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Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5481st meeting

Friday, 30 June 2006, 3.25 p.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Løj	(Denmark)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Kitaoka
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/458)

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/462)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-41366 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/458)

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/462)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Austria, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Morocco, Norway, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and Zimbabwe in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Carmon (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 30 June 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/465, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Friday, 30 June 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to take a seat at the Council table.

I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 30 June 2006 from the representative of Senegal which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal to the United Nations, be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Paul Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The Security Council is meeting in response to the requests contained in letters dated 29 June 2006

from the Permanent Representatives of Algeria and Qatar addressed to the President of the Security Council, documents S/2006/458 and S/2006/462, respectively.

I wish to draw the attention of the members to the following documents: S/2006/436 and S/2006/463, letters dated 26 and 29 June 2006, respectively, from Israel addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2006/459, letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2006/443 and S/2006/460, letters dated 28 and 29 June 2006, respectively, from Palestine addressed to the President of the Security Council.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I now give her the floor.

Ms. Kane: At approximately 5 o'clock in the morning on Sunday 25 June, eight Palestinian militants left the southern Gaza Strip via a tunnel and infiltrated an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) base near the Kerem Shalom Kibbutz. The militants fired several anti-tank rockets into the IDF base and a gun battle took place. Corporal Gilad Shalit, an IDF soldier also holding French nationality, was taken hostage and is now being held by militants in Gaza. Two IDF soldiers were killed and a further three wounded. Two Palestinian militants were killed in the operation.

Three Palestinian militant groups — the Nasser Salah el-Din Troops of the Popular Resistance Committees; the Izz el-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas military wing; and the newly formed Islamic Army — issued a statement confirming that they had conducted the operation and were holding the soldier. They subsequently stated that he would not be released and that information on his state of health would not be provided before Israel releases all Palestinian female and under-age detainees.

The Palestinian Authority spokesman called upon those who abducted the Israeli soldier to guarantee his safety. President Abbas called for the release of the soldier. He met with Prime Minister Haniyeh and contacted international counterparts. Prime Minister Olmert ruled out negotiations over any exchange of prisoners. The Israeli cabinet agreed that the Palestinian Authority would bear full responsibility for any harm to Corporal Shalit and approved recommendations to prepare and deploy Israeli forces for urgent military action.

International efforts to secure the peaceful release of the soldier, especially by Egypt and reportedly by France and Jordan, have been continuous. The Secretary-General has been in frequent touch with parties in the region, including Prime Minister Olmert, President Abbas and President Al-Assad of Syria. He is also consulting individually with his Quartet partners.

The Israeli military operation to obtain the release of Corporal Shalit began just after midnight on 28 June. The operations began with the destruction by F-16 aircraft of two bridges in central Gaza. The IDF then struck Gaza's only power station from the air and ground forces moved into the Gaza Strip. Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers moved into the airport, located at the south-eastern end of the Strip. Israeli military aircraft broke the sound barrier over Gaza, causing sonic booms. On the same day, four Israeli Air Force fighter jets overflew Syrian territory, breaking the sound barrier over a presidential villa in Lattakia.

There was a further air strike on the afternoon of Wednesday 28 June on a largely disused training camp in the south of the Gaza Strip. Another Israeli incursion into Gaza took place on the early morning of Thursday 29 June. The Israeli Air Force shelled an open area in the compound of the Islamic University in Gaza and Israeli tanks entered northern Gaza. On the afternoon of 29 June, the Israeli Air Force attacked a car in the Gaza Strip. Its occupants escaped.

On 25 June, an 18-year old Israeli from the West Bank settlement of Itamar was abducted by Palestinian militants as he was hitchhiking. His body was found in Ramallah on the morning of Thursday 29 June. The Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for his abduction and killing.

In a military briefing on 29 June, an IDF spokesperson stated that the ongoing operation was aimed at halting rocket attacks on Israel from northern Gaza, in addition to securing the release of the missing soldier. Between 25 and 30 June, Palestinian militants reportedly fired 17 rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, including 11 on 29 June alone. There were no reported casualties.

Also on the night of 29 June, Israeli forces undertook a large-scale arrest raid in the West Bank and Jerusalem, detaining 64 Palestinian Authority officials, including eight ministers and 21 Palestinian Legislative Council members, and 23 suspected militants. The Israeli Attorney General has said that those arrested will be charged under anti-terrorism legislation.

Violence continued last night as the IDF reportedly conducted several operations in the Gaza Strip, including a reported 30 air strikes, as well as in the West Bank. The Ministry of the Interior in Gaza was targeted by an aerial strike and sustained major damage. Two militants from the Al-Aqsa Brigades — the Fatah military wing — were reportedly killed earlier today in Nablus by Israeli military forces, and one Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant died following an air strike in Rafah. No other Palestinian deaths have been reported.

The air attack on the power station on Wednesday destroyed six transformers and the switchyard. The power station cannot transmit, so over 40 per cent of Gaza is now without power. Water pipes were also damaged in the attack and approximately 130,000 people have been without water. Most hospitals possess generators and are continuing to function, and there are sufficient food supplies to last two to three weeks. The crossing points between the Gaza Strip and Israel have been closed since the beginning of the IDF operation, however, so supplies of food and medicine will decrease to critical levels unless those crossings are opened shortly.

The private pipeline that brings fuel from Israel into the Gaza Strip has not been functioning for the past five days. Unless the flow of fuel is restored, supplies are expected to run out this Sunday, 2 July. The humanitarian consequences of a failure of sanitation systems and private generators would be severe, especially given the hot weather. International efforts are under way to restore the flow of fuel into the Gaza Strip.

This is a grave crisis. The slightest turn of events could easily set off another full-scale conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, bringing greater dangers to civilians and having serious regional repercussions. All parties must recognize that, and act with wisdom and care and in full conformity with international humanitarian law. Nothing justifies the holding of hostages. Corporal Gilad Shalit must be released. Nothing justifies indiscriminate rocket attacks. The Palestinian Authority must act to stop them. However, Palestinian civilians should not pay the price of those actions. Israel must cease the destruction of civilian infrastructure, ensure that civilians are protected and allow for humanitarian assistance to get where it needs to go. We are also extremely concerned at the arrest of a large section of the elected Palestinian Government.

All concerned parties must step back from the brink and give dialogue a chance to avert a full-scale confrontation that will only lock Israelis and Palestinians in deeper and deadlier conflict.

The President: I thank Ms. Kane for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Just two days ago, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs addressed the Security Council and reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community, under the relevant rules and provisions of international law, to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In that regard, he stated that

> "There are too many times when we still do not come to the defence of civilian populations in need. When our response is weak, we appear to wash our hands of our humanitarian responsibilities to protect lives. The world is ... a safer place for most of us, but it is still a death trap for too many defenceless civilians — men, women and children. (*S/PV.5476, p. 2*)

For the Palestinian civilian population being held captive under Israel's belligerent military occupation, such a statement tragically and precisely describes the situation of that people over the 39 years since Israel occupied the Palestinian territory in 1967, up until today. The occupying Power has been systematically and egregiously violating international law, particularly the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to which it is bound.

The images of the thousands of innocent and defenceless Palestinian civilians murdered by the Israeli occupying forces are indelibly etched in our memories, including those children, women and men killed in recent weeks by the barrage of Israeli missiles that have rained down on the Gaza Strip. In the month

of June alone, the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the occupying Power against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip has made death, mourning and grief a near-daily ritual, as it has resulted in the killing of several members of the same families, has left numerous children motherless and fatherless, has deprived mothers and fathers of their young children and babies and has maimed and wounded thousands of others. For the Palestinian people, the protection of their human lives — to which they are entitled under international law, just like all other civilians in situations of armed conflict — remains elusive, as the international community has remained passive about their plight, leaving them to continue suffering more loss, misery and hardship at the mercy of their occupier.

The list of flagrant violations and grave breaches of international law — war crimes — that have been and are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is endless. The list of pretexts used by the occupying Power for its continuing systematic violations and crimes is endless as well –including, for example, having no partner for peace, so-called security concerns and, now, the capture of a soldier of the occupying forces.

Yet such pretexts ring hollow when the situation is accurately examined. What we are witnessing today in the occupied Palestinian territory — the blatant military aggression by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people and their leadership, and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population — is clearly rooted in the long history of Israel's brutalization, humiliation and dehumanization of the Palestinian people for the purpose of furthering Israel's malicious agenda against the occupied territory and its people, specifically including its insatiable desire to acquire land through its colonial settlement campaign and the construction of the wall.

The scope and scale of the recent military assaults and the wanton destruction being carried out by the Israeli occupying forces in the Gaza Strip indicate that this flagrant military aggression against the Palestinian population under occupation was clearly premeditated and planned. Indeed, well prior to the capture of the Israeli soldier on 25 June from a military outpost on the Gaza border, Israel, the occupying Power, had issued a series of threats and declarations about its intention to launch a major invasion of the Gaza Strip and had begun to mobilize its troops. The soldier's capture became the spark, or the pretext, for the actual launching of the invasion.

Two days ago, on 28 June, Israel, the occupying Power, after amassing thousands of troops along the southern border of the Gaza Strip, near the Rafah area, launched a major air and ground military assault on the Gaza Strip, using warplanes, tank artillery, bombardment and shelling from naval units. That assault is threatening the lives of the defenceless Palestinian civilian population in the area, causing wanton destruction of civilian property and infrastructure and further destabilizing the fragile situation on the ground. Collectively punishing and terrorizing the Palestinian civilian population, the Israeli occupying forces have bombed and destroyed Gaza's only power station, leaving the majority of the population without electricity.

The occupying forces have also bombed major water pipelines — making clean water even more scarce — and have destroyed three bridges in Gaza, severely undermining movement throughout the area. In addition, the occupying forces have been flying warplanes over civilian neighbourhoods throughout day and night, causing sonic booms intended to cause fear and panic among the population. They have bulldozed large tracts of agricultural land, bombed a soccer field and launched missile strikes against official Palestinian Government institutions, including the Ministry of Interior in Gaza.

Hundreds of Palestinians, particularly from the Rafah area, have fled their homes in search of safety in a place where nowhere seems to be safe from Israel's military onslaught, which is expected to expand, as Israel has now deployed thousands more troops along the northern border of Gaza, threatening to invade Palestinian towns and refugee camps in the north. The Palestinian civilian population in the devastated and impoverished Gaza Strip is now under complete siege, as Israel has also sealed all border crossings, and — with the deprivation of electricity and clean water, including for hospitals, and intensifying shortages of food and medical supplies — the dire humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is being severely exacerbated. In this regard, it should be noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross, among others, has today expressed its deep concern regarding Israel's military

escalation in the Gaza Strip and has called upon Israel, in accordance with its obligations under international law, to allow for the delivery of urgent medical supplies to Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip to alleviate this grave humanitarian crisis.

Following the launch of this invasion on Wednesday, the Israeli occupying forces yesterday expanded their aggression into the West Bank, carrying out a series of raids and the kidnapping and detention of at least 64 Palestinians, the majority of them high-ranking, democratically elected officials, including eight cabinet ministers of the Palestinian Authority, 24 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and several mayors. Those officials, in addition to the more than 9,000 other Palestinians, including women and children, imprisoned in Israeli jails, are being held by the occupying Power in blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, the direct targeting by Israel of senior Palestinian officials in such an operation is a clear indication that all of this is being done for political objectives: it is intended to sabotage the recent agreement achieved among Palestinian parties for reconciliation and unity, and is also intended not only to severely hamper the functioning of the Palestinian Authority, but ultimately to cause the complete collapse of the Authority as a whole, thus clearing the way for Israel to continue with its unlawful unilateral measures and plans, on the pretext of having "no partner for peace".

Indeed, this recent Israeli military campaign was coincidentally launched on the eve of the agreement reached among Palestinian parties directly aimed at opening the door for a resumption of negotiations and the peace process. The continuation and the expected expansion of Israeli military aggression will surely pre-empt any such resumption, thus killing the prospects for negotiations between the two sides aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement, based on the two-State solution, and the occupying Power will thus achieve its objective of leaving no option except unilateralism.

And yet, despite the relentless Israeli onslaught and the incessant crimes and State terror being committed against the Palestinian people, the Palestinian leadership continues to choose the diplomatic option. Under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian side is sparing no effort to resolve the issue of the Israel soldier taken prisoner, to make sure that he is treated in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law and to secure his release unharmed. Such efforts have been exerted simultaneously with the efforts exerted to secure agreement among all Palestinian parties for national unity and to promote calm. President Abbas continues to call for diplomacy to be given a chance in order to save many lives on the Palestinian side — and also on the Israeli side — and to save Palestinian civilian infrastructure from even further destruction and avert the further deterioration of this humanitarian tragedy being caused by the crimes of the occupying Power against the Palestinian people. Israel, the occupying Power, should reciprocate such serious efforts by abandoning the military option, which will lead to only more suffering and loss and will further destabilize the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond, in the region as a whole, clearly making this a matter of international peace and security.

It is now the duty of the Security Council, in accordance with its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter, to act in order to address the crisis situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Council cannot continue to remain passive in the face of such military aggression against a defenseless civilian population and the grave breaches of international humanitarian law that are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power. The Council should act by condemning this Israeli aggression and calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for compliance with the rules and provisions of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and calling also for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from within the Gaza Strip and for the release of the Palestinian officials being detained. The Security Council and other concerned parties within the international community must exert the necessary efforts to pressure all parties to move away from aggression and back towards the resumption of negotiations and the peace process.

Failure by the Council to take the measures required to bring a halt to this most recent Israeli aggression and a halt to the collective punishment and human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people will surely only further bolster the occupying Power's impunity and perpetuate the cycle of violence reignited by Israel, worsening the humanitarian conditions and civilian suffering in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East

Jerusalem, and taking us all even further away from the realization of the peace so desperately yearned for. Moreover, as we stated last week before the Council during its important debate on strengthening international law (see S/PV.5474), the repeated inability of the Council to act with regard to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has not only aggravated and prolonged the conflict, but has resulted in the questioning of the strength of international law and of the credibility of the Council in its fair implementation of international law.

We reiterate today that it is not too late for the Security Council to assert its rightful and proper role and to use its authority to address this issue through appropriate measures aimed at bringing an end to the grave breaches being committed, bringing an end to the hostilities and salvaging the prospects for reaching a peaceful settlement on the basis of international law, United Nations resolutions, the Quartet road map and the Arab peace initiative. We affirm our belief in the authority and the ability of the Security Council and in the primacy and legitimacy of international law, and once more convey to the members of the Council our strong hope — the hope of the Palestinian people and their leadership — that the Council will uphold its duties and responsibilities and will thus spare us all from the tragedy of even more loss and suffering.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Carmon (Israel): At the outset, Madam President, I would like to congratulate on your leadership of the Council for the month of June. We know that it has been an eventful and complicated month, and your able stewardship has been much appreciated.

Allow me to share the facts concerning the latest developments on the ground. On Sunday, 25 June, at approximately 5.30 a.m., members of Hamas, along with its partner terror organizations, infiltrated Israel near the Kerem Shalom border crossing with the Gaza Strip, through a deep tunnel dug 300 metres into Israeli territory. During the ensuing attack, Palestinian terrorists killed two Israeli soldiers, First Lieutenant Hanan Barak, age 20, and Staff Sergeant Pavel Slutzker, also age 20. They kidnapped one soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit, age 19, and wounded three others. The terrorist organizations Hamas, the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) and Jaish al-Islam — the Army of Islam — took responsibility for the attack. The last of these organizations is a new, previously unknown terror group.

Gilad Shalit is currently being held hostage and his whereabouts are not known. On that same day, the PRC kidnapped and subsequently shot and murdered an 18-year old Israeli civilian, Eliyahu Asheri. He was murdered on the day of his abduction and his body was discovered late Wednesday night by Israeli forces.

These Palestinian terrorist attacks were launched after weeks of Israeli restraint in the face of numerous attempted kidnappings and unceasing Kassam rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip that have targeted civilians, schools and homes, traumatized children and paralyzed the city of Sderot.

As the Council will recall, Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip last August with the hope of creating a window of opportunity and re-energizing the peace process. Instead, the response was an actualization of Israel's worry — an increase in terrorist attacks. Gaza is now a terror base, actively supported by the elected Hamas Government. Israel is under attack day in and day out. Terrorists have perpetrated suicide bombings, gunfire shootings, stabbing attacks, Katyusha and Kassam rocket fire, explosions and Molotov cocktail attacks and other forms of terror. Only two weeks ago, two young girls luckily escaped yet another kidnapping attempt. But this is only one example.

One particular form of continuous Palestinian terror has been the barrage of Kassam rockets launched into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. Since last October, more than 600 Kassam rockets have fallen onto Israeli cities and territory, and in just this past week more than 50 rockets were launched from Gaza. In the city of Sderot, a constant target of Kassam fire, rockets have struck homes, schools and places of work and have injured numerous people, causing shrapnel wounds, shock and trauma. The clear target of these rocket attacks is men, women and children — Israeli civilians.

Madam President, members of the Security Council, what would the mayors and citizens of your respective cities demand of your Governments? How would your respective Governments react to such blatant acts of terrorism?

The aggressive terrorist provocations of the past week and indeed those in recent months have persisted

only because they are supported by the official Palestinian Government, a terrorist regime with a sworn intent to deny us our most fundamental human rights. Hamas is committed to a radical and militant ideology, and continues — even as we are meeting at this moment — to engage in terrorism and reject the very tenets of the peace process.

Hamas declared this month that it is renouncing its ceasefire. Yet its campaign of terror has always been its prime objective. We were not surprised when in fact Hamas broke its ceasefire, engaging in rocket attacks with its partner organizations one week prior to its deceptive declaration. This deception was corroborated only when we learned, this past Sunday, that for months it had been digging a deep tunnel in order to infiltrate Israel.

But Hamas is not alone. The dangerous realities in the Middle East are further inflamed by the active and direct collaboration between Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and Palestinian terror groups, comprising an axis of terror.

The first and foremost obligation of every State is to protect its citizens. Each and every member of this Council and of this Organization understands this responsibility. Alongside maintaining peace, it is the premise of government to protect its citizens. This responsibility is enshrined in the most basic principles of international law.

Israel is deeply concerned about the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit. That is a grave humanitarian issue and, as a Sovereign state, it is our duty to do all that we can to bring about his safe return.

From the moment initial reports of Gilad's kidnapping were received, Israel spared no effort in exploring and exhausting all diplomatic channels and, in particular, gave Chairman Abbas every opportunity to secure his safe release, which can be seen as a test of his leadership. Even in Damascus — where Khaled Meshaal, a leader of Hamas, keeps his headquarters and liaises with the Assad regime — many important communications were received in order to influence Corporal Shalit's safe return. Indeed, many leaders in our region agree that Meshaal is the key to resolving this humanitarian crisis.

Nevertheless, the diplomatic efforts have so far been fruitless. With the passing of each hour, the threat to the life and well-being of Gilad has intensified and the urgency of ending this crisis is becoming even greater. May I remind Council members of the outcome of similar cases, in Israel and in other countries, where soldiers, journalists, humanitarian workers and civilians were kidnapped, brutally tortured, slaughtered and beheaded.

Israel, like any other responsible Government, cannot tolerate a situation in which its citizens are being held hostage by members of a terrorist group such as Hamas. Let me assure the Council that we did not disengage from the Gaza Strip in order to return to it. It is not in our moral, security or financial interests or in our interest in any other form. As it now stands, the Israeli army's presence is limited to a very small area in southern Gaza, with the sole aim of preventing Corporal Shalit from being smuggled outside of the Gaza Strip by his terrorist captors. The military operation now taking place is thus specific in nature and limited in scope. Its objective is not punishment or retaliation. Israel is taking every effort to minimize any harm to Palestinian civilians. Indeed, just an hour ago, Defense Minister Amir Peretz declared that Israel is immediately planning to take steps to ease the humanitarian situation on the ground in Gaza.

International terrorism is the largest challenge to global peace and security. In Israel, it remains the greatest obstacle to the safety and security of our citizens. Our duty to confront this threat has guided our efforts since even before Israel's inception.

Our goal with this military endeavour is in line with our legitimate right to live in security. In the light of the escalation of Palestinian terrorism, Israel has decided to intensify its efforts to arrest those operatives responsible for terrorist attacks so they can be tried and brought to justice. Israel will not accept terrorism even if it is hidden behind political titles. The world should recognize those who purposefully and intentionally target innocents as exactly what they are: terrorists. We should not be fooled by their suits and ties. We should rather listen to what they are saying and look at what they are doing.

Sadly, our worst fears about a terrorist organization taking over the Palestinian Authority have now been realized. The world is now witnessing the true colours of Hamas. The grave developments this week reaffirm the importance of the policy that the international community adopted following the recent Palestinian elections, in particular the three core

conditions that it has called on the Palestinian Government to fulfil if it is to be considered a legitimate political partner. It is therefore critical that the international community continue to strictly adhere to this policy. It should not be led astray by any vague Palestinian formulations that fail to demonstrate an unconditional commitment to any of those three stipulations.

We are deeply concerned by the grave turn of recent events in our region. Yet the responsibility for those developments lies squarely on the shoulders of Hamas, which has perpetrated these crimes, and of the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, who has been unable to stop terrorism from emanating from his territory. We urge the international community to continue applying all possible political pressure on the Palestinian Authority and on the Hamas terrorist organization, including its members and sponsors in Damascus, so as to ensure the immediate and safe release of the Gilad Shalit and to finally bring an end to the use of Palestinian territory as a base for terrorist operations. Our common commitment to fighting terrorism and to empowering those who are genuinely committed to peace demands no less.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are strongly urged to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank you, Madam, for having convened this emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We would also like to thank Ms. Angela Kane for her briefing to the Council today.

Over the past two days, Israeli military forces have conducted a large-scale military operation involving air bombardment and the use of ground forces, leading to the total destruction of infrastructure. Bridges, universities and power stations were deliberately targeted, paralysing daily life in the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip was totally closed to access by air, land and sea, thereby isolating about 1.5 million Palestinians from the outside world and restricting the movement of citizens, leading to the economic strangulation of the Gaza Strip and to grave food shortages.

The Beit Hanoun crossing point, which is used by international relief workers, was also closed, which constitutes an obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Israeli air force is flying low over the Gaza Strip, breaking the sound barrier and causing sonic booms in an attempt to intimidate and terrorize the civilian population. The occupying Power has detained 64 members of the Legislative Council and Palestinian Government ministers — about one third of the elected Palestinian Government.

The military campaign is by no means proportionate to its declared objective. Rather, it represents the punishment of Palestinian civilians through the destruction of civilian property far removed from military targets and which do not in any way contribute to military activities. Such measures represent acts of collective punishment, which are banned under the terms of article 43 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

These latest practices are but a link in a chain — the Israeli Government's escalation of policies that harm the Palestinian people, including extrajudicial killings and the indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population. Such irresponsible Israeli practices constitute a grave violation of international treaties, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. They constitute a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, they will only exacerbate the violence in the region and lead to the abandonment of the road map, thereby dealing a severe blow to any chance to bringing about peace in the Middle East, as will the provocative flights being carried out by the Israeli air force in the airspace of a neighbouring Arab State.

It is incumbent upon the international community, represented by the Security Council, which has sole responsibility for international peace and security, to adopt a responsible attitude and put an end to such violations.

Last week, we held an open debate on strengthening international law and the rule of law and preserving international peace and security (see S/PV.5474). This week, we discussed the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.5476). We listened to all of the speakers in those debates reaffirm the importance of those two issues. However, today

one Member of the Organization is totally ignoring the initiative whose importance we emphasized only yesterday. This is, indeed, a test of the credibility and determination of the Security Council regarding its commitments in that respect. If the Council does not take firm and robust measures to deal with this situation, its authority in the area of international law and the protection of civilians will be eroded.

The right of Israel to defend the lives and security of its citizens is not in question. However, the life of one soldier should not be counted at the expense of an entire people. If we follow such formulas in international relations, the world will face true catastrophe.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the State of Qatar believes that the peace process must continue and that all parties must renounce violence and respect the resolutions of the international community, notably the commitment to the road map, as proposed by the Quartet, relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab peace initiative.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): The Permanent Representative of Austria will shortly be making a statement on behalf of the European Union, which I fully support. I would like to make a few additional comments.

France is extremely concerned about developments in the situation in the Middle East. While we recognize the legitimate right of Israel to self-defence, we call for the greatest restraint in the Israeli operations under way, in particular to protect the Palestinian civilian population. We reaffirm the pre-eminence of diplomatic paths for obtaining the release of the Israeli soldier. We call for the speediest possible end to Israeli incursions in Gaza and in zone A of the West Bank so as to facilitate the de-escalation of violence in the region.

It is essential that the Palestinian Authority urgently take all necessary measures to halt the firing of missiles and acts of violence of all kinds against Israel and its citizens. Furthermore, we condemn the killing of the young Israeli settler who was kidnapped in the West Bank. We reaffirm that the Hamas-led Palestinian Government must adhere to the three principles laid down by the Quartet: renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of international instruments and obligations. It is also essential, however, to protect the Palestinian Authority as an institution and to guarantee the possibility of future dialogue and negotiation.

The arrest by Israel of members of the Government and the Legislative Council and other Palestinian political leaders is a direct threat to the very existence of Palestinian institutions. We therefore call for their release.

As the Secretary-General has said, it is essential that all the parties urgently take measures with a view to a de-escalation. It is essential to restore the conditions for a resumption of negotiations with a view to a just, equitable and lasting settlement based on law that will enable the Israeli and Palestinian States and peoples to finally live in peace and security.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is grateful to you, Madam President, for having organized this public meeting on the current situation in the Middle East. We also thank Ms. Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the information she brought to our attention.

Once again, urgency compels us to consider an extremely grave situation: that of Palestine. The spark that ignited the conflagration was the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier following a commando operation targeting an Israeli military facility. We may well wonder about the reasons — the real motives — behind that act, or even about its appropriateness in a context as delicate as that of a contentious Israeli-Palestinian situation that is so sensitive to manage — all the more so when we consider that recently, some rather positive developments had eased our minds a bit in that regard.

I am referring to the inter-Palestinian talks between Fatah and Hamas, which had shown some progress, to the point where one could speak of a certain de facto, implicit recognition of Israel by the current Palestinian Government. I am referring also to at least the announcement of a gradual resumption by international partners of financial assistance to the Palestinian authorities. Above all, there was the issue of a return to the road map thanks to the joint efforts of the parties, particularly President Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Egypt and other international partners were associated with those efforts. We commend their goodwill and their readiness to assist.

My country cannot fail to deplore any bellicose attitude, which, in such a context, weakens the chances for peace and law while increasing those for tension

and crisis. Therefore, the kidnapping and holding of the Israeli soldier by the Palestinian groups claiming responsibility is unacceptable. It is an unfortunate act that we cannot in any way encourage.

Israel thus found a pretext for carrying out disproportionate military operations that have had the result of intolerably worsening the ever more precarious lives of the Palestinian people, who today are largely deprived of water and electricity and subjected to true official terrorism.

Previous speakers, including the representatives of Palestine and Qatar, have already described how the actions carried out by the Israeli army are in violation of the relevant international conventions and humanitarian law. Our indignation extends to the arrest and detention of Palestinian officials, ministers and parliamentarians, which mock the Palestinian Authority's legitimate institutions.

At this stage, we should like to appeal to the goodwill of all the parties to continue to give priority to the objectives of peace within the framework of the road map so that the Middle East can commit itself to the path towards a peaceful solution and turn away, once and for all we hope, from violence as a way to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At this stage, that is all we would like to say. We express the hope that the international community, particularly the Security Council, will, to the extent possible, lend its support to the efforts of the individuals and institutions of good will that are prepared to help Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): We are all aware of the seriousness of the situation that is unfolding in the Middle East. Let me state that our first and foremost goal here in the Security Council should be to avoid taking any steps that would unexpectedly exacerbate tensions in the region. To that end, we feel that we should tread cautiously before issuing any remarks, much less a formal statement, given the complexity of the situation. We should not undermine the limited credibility of the Council by engaging in debate and rhetoric merely for their own sake. Such exercises undermine the United Nations generally and provide evidence for those who say it is all talk and no action.

The United States calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Israel Defense Forces Corporal Gilad Shalit by Hamas. That is the best way to achieve our shared goal of a peaceful resolution of the immediate crisis. Terrorism of any kind — which this clearly constitutes — is intolerable, and the international community must stand united in opposing it. The attack and hostage-taking by Hamas last week precipitated this crisis, and their refusal to release their hostage continues to place innocent Palestinians in harm's way. We further condemn the brutal murder of 18-year-old Israeli citizen Eliyahu Asheri, and our condolences go out to his family.

Upon the safe and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit, we are hopeful that the parties in the region can continue discussions about the best way forward to establish a lasting peace. The United States is of the firm view that a prerequisite for ending this conflict is that the Governments of Syria and Iran end their role as State sponsors of terror and unequivocally condemn the actions of Hamas, including this kidnapping.

As we urge for calm in the region, let us remain cognizant of the fact that we would not be where we are right now if it were not for Syria's support and harbouring of terrorists. We call upon President Assad to lend his support to international efforts to resolve the situation. An important first step in that regard would be for Syria to arrest Khaled Meshaal, a known international terrorist and member of Hamas, and to close down the various terrorist headquarters in Damascus. In addition, we call upon Syria to stop financing the terrorists and to stop cooperating with other States, such as Iran, that finance terrorists.

At the same time, it is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority Government to stop all acts of violence and terror and to comply with the principles enunciated by the Quartet: renounce terror, recognize Israel and accept previous obligations and agreements, including the road map.

We call upon the current leaders of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to fully support and implement these principles set forth by the Quartet. An immediate first step in that regard would be for Hamas to secure the safe and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit.

The G-8 noted yesterday its concern about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian

Authority and legislature. We call on all parties to avoid actions that could escalate this situation or harm innocent civilians, while acknowledging Israel's unequivocal right to defend itself and the lives of its citizens.

During this period of crisis, we urge close attention to the humanitarian needs of the population of Gaza and action to ensure that those needs are met expeditiously.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation): We are grateful to Ms. Kane for her briefing.

The Russian Federation is deeply concerned at the new and dangerous developments that have taken place in the Gaza Strip. The situation in the region, in Palestinian-Israeli relations and, indeed, throughout the entire Middle East region is becoming increasingly serious. Additional urgent action is required to prevent further destabilization, and all parties must show restraint and wisdom and understand what a dangerous point they have reached.

Large-scale operations by the Israeli armed forces in the Gaza Strip can lead to significant losses among the civilian population and seriously complicate prospects of eventually reaching an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

In order to avoid an escalation in the crisis, the Russian delegation is calling on the leadership of the Palestinian Authority to take decisive measures to curb the extremists and to halt raids by terrorists, attacks on Israeli citizens and Qassam missile attacks against Israeli territory. Most importantly, the captured Israeli soldier must be released.

All Palestinian movements must understand that any deterioration in the situation could only harm the realization of the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Of course, Israel, for its part, must also find a way to bring about stabilization. There is no doubt that Israel has the right and the obligation to protect the life and security of its citizens. However, it cannot do so at the cost of serious consequences for the Palestinian civilian population and through collective punishment of the inhabitants of Gaza and other regions of Palestine.

It is absolutely inadmissible, under the pretext of bringing pressure to bear on extremists, to violate the borders and air space of other countries of the region — in this case, Syria's. We are particularly concerned by Israel's arrest and detention of Palestinian Government ministers and Legislative Council deputies. Those persons received their mandates following independent and democratic elections — that is, in the context of the process of the development of democracy in the region of the Middle East, on whose further deepening there is broad international agreement.

Russia sees only one way out of the existing situation: to halt resistance by force and to achieve a political settlement through negotiations. The only other alternative is the further destabilization of the situation in the region, which would be extremely dangerous and certainly spread.

We are profoundly concerned by the serious humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories; it is only worsening as a result of the latest deterioration of the situation there. We need as soon as possible to begin practical work on the provisional international mechanism approved by the Quartet of leading international mediators and implement the mechanism for giving assistance to the Palestinian people, with the active participation of donors.

We must first and foremost ensure the uninterrupted supply of fuel and medicine to Gaza. Russia, in the course of its contacts with Israelis and Palestinians, will continue its endeavours to induce the parties to abide by the positions agreed upon by the Quartet. That has already been discussed at the meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of the G-8 in Moscow on 29 June, where a corresponding position of solidarity was agreed upon.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): We, too, would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ms. Kane, for her briefing.

Since Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, I will limit my statement to the following remarks.

We are deeply concerned about the recent escalating tensions and the upsurge in violence in Gaza as well as the widespread deterioration in the security situation in the Middle East. We therefore call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to do everything possible to calm the situation and to prevent

its further dangerous escalation, which could only lead to suffering and the loss of lives.

We urge the Palestinian Authority to undertake all necessary measures and to make every effort to find and release the kidnapped Israeli soldier and prevent further military and terrorist attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres. We support the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and his efforts to achieve that goal, and we hope that the Palestinian Government will cooperate towards that end.

We also strongly condemn the recent killing of the young Israeli civilian who had been kidnapped. In that regard, we call on the Palestinian Authority to take immediate measures to put an end to acts of terrorist violence and to adhere to the three principles set out by the Quartet.

With respect to Israel, although we believe it has the right of self-defence against terrorism and its perpetrators, and although we understand its anxiety over the well-being of its kidnapped soldier and its desire for his quick and safe release, we stress that Israel's measures and responses must be always proportionate and that everything possible must be done to avoid any loss of innocent life as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure and to prevent any further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. We also call on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint with regard to flights over Syrian territory.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Middle East conflict based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and on negotiations between the two sides. We urge both sides to return to a constructive dialogue and to take concrete actions aimed at building and strengthening mutual confidence and trust.

In conclusion, I should like to stress once again that there can be no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict is through peaceful negotiations leading to a two-State solution, in accordance with the road map.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): Like others, I am grateful to Assistant Secretary-General Kane for her briefing.

At the outset, I should like to align myself with the statement to be made shortly by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Like others, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned at the current situation in Gaza, and in particular at the escalation in violence, so we urge both sides to show the utmost restraint. The urgent priority is the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit. That is in everyone's interests.

We condemn the killing of two Israeli soldiers at the weekend and the murder of Eliyahu Asheri, but it is important that Israel abide by international law. It should seek to avoid civilian casualties and any action that adds to the suffering of the Palestinian people. As the G-8 foreign ministers said in Moscow yesterday, "the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature raises particular concerns". Those detained should be accorded their full legal rights.

Most importantly, politics should be allowed to take hold over violence. Every effort should be made to maximize the chances of finding a diplomatic solution to the present situation. We urge all parties to find a way back to negotiations, which are the best way of ensuring a lasting peace, and to restore calm for the sake of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

We share the concerns expressed about the humanitarian situation and note that Israel is planning immediately to take steps to ease that situation. Restoring electricity and water supplies and access for humanitarian organizations must be a priority.

Given those humanitarian concerns, it might be appropriate to say something now about progress in establishing the temporary international mechanism. We have repeatedly emphasized the wish of the United Kingdom to see help given to the basic needs of the Palestinian people. We are not in the business of punishing Palestinians for the way they voted, but nor are we prepared to put our funds through a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority that has yet to demonstrate commitment to the Quartet's three principles. That is why the United Kingdom has been leading international efforts to find other ways of helping the Palestinians, including through the establishment of the temporary international mechanism.

Following endorsement by the Quartet on 17 June, the European Commission now has teams on

the ground working to set up the mechanism. The Commission is particularly focused on delivering allowances to front-line health workers, and expects to make the first of those payments by the middle of July. The mechanism is already paying some utility bills. The other parts of the mechanism, paying for health supplies and social security payments for the poorest Palestinians, are in the process of being established as a matter of urgency by the Commission and the World Bank.

Finally, let me repeat the firm British view that a return to negotiations represents the best way to ensure lasting peace. Negotiations are manifestly the best way to move the process forward. It is the role of the international community and the responsibility of this Council to encourage negotiations and give them the best chances of success. We cannot do that while violence continues at its current level and while one party refuses to accept the right of the other to exist.

Mr. Kitaoka (Japan): I, too, should like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kane for her briefing.

The situation surrounding Palestine and Israel presents critical challenges at this time. All parties concerned must exercise the utmost restraint in order to avoid a further escalation of the situation.

Japan is deeply concerned over the deterioration of the situation caused by the recent acts of violence by the Palestinian extremist groups and the military operations conducted by the Israel Defense Forces, mainly in the Gaza Strip. We call on the Government of the Palestinian Authority to bring to an end the violence by the Palestinian extremist groups, including rocket attacks, and to make every possible effort to secure the immediate release of the Israeli soldier abducted on 25 June.

In that regard, Japan has been working for immediate action on that case through various examples. For example, Mr. Tatsuo Arima, Special Envoy of the Government of Japan on the Middle East Peace Process, appealed to President Abbas on 26 June to make efforts to resolve this matter.

Japan calls upon the Government of Israel, in particular, to exercise maximum restraint. We strongly urge the Israeli Government to avoid actions that cause casualties among Palestinian civilians, as well as those which bring about the destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as electric power stations, and thus directly impact the daily lives of the Palestinian population. The detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature is cause for grave concern. Japan also expresses its regret at the flight by Israeli military aircraft over Syrian territory, which can only serve to heighten the tension in the region.

Japan is deeply concerned over the negative impact which the deterioration of the situation will have on future efforts for peace. At the same time, we strongly hope that the situation will calm down and that an environment will prevail that is conducive to negotiations for peace. To that end, Japan welcomes the pledges made by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas last week to undertake negotiations, and Japan supports the efforts made by President Abbas to advance the peace process. We also expect Israel to refrain from taking any unilateral action that might prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

We are concerned about the further exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in Palestine. We reiterate at this critical juncture the importance for the international community, including Israel, to continue providing humanitarian assistance and to take necessary measures for that purpose.

One year ago, at the time of President Abbas' visit to Japan, Prime Minister Koizumi announced an assistance package of approximately $100 million for the immediate future in support of the President's peace efforts and for the well-being of the Palestinian people. About 80 per cent of the pledged amount has been disbursed to date. Japan, as one of the major donors to Palestine, will address the improvement of the humanitarian situation in an appropriate manner. It is of primary importance, however, for the Israeli Government fully to resume the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority in order to improve the fiscal and humanitarian situations in Palestine.

In conclusion, we announced last Wednesday that Prime Minister Koizumi will be making a visit to Israel, Palestine and Jordan just prior to the forthcoming Group of 8 summit meeting, if the situation permits. During his visit, he will hold talks with his counterparts to seek ways for the advancement of the Middle East peace process through negotiation,

and encourage the relevant leaders to take a proactive role in that endeavour.

Mrs. Taj (United Republic of Tanzania): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her update on the situation in the Middle East.

Like other delegations, we are deeply troubled by the recent developments in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The upsurge of violence in the past three days, sparked by the abduction of an Israeli soldier by the military wing of Hamas, is deeply regrettable. It is clear that the Israeli incursion into Gaza over the kidnapping of the soldier is aimed at persuading the Palestinians to give him up. Israel has a right to defend its people, but instead of engaging in such a broad military action, it should have given dialogue a chance. The outcome of the incursion in search of the kidnapped solider is hurting the Palestinian civilian population disproportionately.

As a result of the Israeli action, a large of part of overpopulated Gaza is without water, electricity and fuel — a situation likely to lead to a humanitarian disaster of unimaginable proportions. That is above and beyond the difficulties that the Palestinians are already experiencing on account of unpaid salaries and the refusal to transfer funds to pay for basic social services.

We call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for dialogue to replace military action. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to try to find a solution to the current crisis.

In this very complicated political and military situation, we urge both sides to exercise maximum restraint. The use of force cannot provide a solution to this problem; on the contrary, it will aggravate it. To de-escalate the tension, Hamas should release the Israeli soldier. For its part, Israel should realize that military pressure only ends in counter-violence from the Palestinian side. It should therefore observe international law, exercise caution and avoid strengthening the resolve of the Hamas military wing and other military groups to continue fighting.

The arrests that Israel has made of the Hamas leadership are unjustified and can only serve to increase hostilities. We believe that their release will help to reduce tension.

Meanwhile, we appeal for international efforts to calm the situation and for action to avert a humanitarian crisis in the area.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I would like to express the appreciation of my delegation to you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, where Israeli troops have carried out military operations in Gaza, including air strikes, aimed at securing the release of a soldier abducted by Palestinian militants could, if not contained, lead to more violence, with dire consequences for the Palestinian people and further damage to the prospects for the resumption of negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We must address the present grave situation in the Middle East with serious concern. We therefore call on the Palestinian Authority to do all in its power to secure the release of the abducted Israeli soldier. Meanwhile, Israel should cease forthwith all military operations, including air strikes, withdraw its forces from Gaza and release detained Palestinian officials. We hope that the efforts being made to achieve a negotiated solution to this crisis will bear fruit and lead to the end of yet another dark episode in the Middle East crisis.

Furthermore, my delegation wishes to reiterate its condemnation of all acts of violence. We call on the Palestinian Authority to act decisively against rocket attacks on Israel. At the same time, Israel must desist from launching future military attacks into the occupied Palestinian territory.

My delegation is very concerned about the consequences of Israeli military operations on the Palestinian people, who already find life unbearable because of the economic pressure being brought to bear on the Palestinian Authority by Israel. Ongoing Israeli air strikes have affected power supplies, and there is an acute lack of fuel in Gaza. The water supply system could also be affected. A widespread humanitarian crisis, with probable devastating consequences, could therefore be in the offing. However, the economic and institutional collapse of the occupied Palestinian territory must, of necessity, be avoided at all costs.

Israel and the Hamas Government should now move back from the brink of full-scale hostilities and seek peace, bearing in mind that that is the only way to achieve their goals. Clearly, the international community must remain actively engaged in the search for a solution to this crisis and must once more renew its commitment to the objectives of the right of Israelis to their own State within well defined and secure boundaries and equally to the right of Palestinians to their own independent State that guarantees freedom of movement for its citizens.

Mrs. Papadopoulou (Greece): I would first like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for today's briefing.

Greece fully associates itself with the statement to be made shortly by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

In the last few days, the cycle of violence in the Middle East has reached new peaks, and the situation seems to be reaching an extremely dangerous point. It was only a week ago that, during our last discussions on the developments in the region, we expressed our concern over recent incidents in Gaza and the West Bank and condemned, in the strongest terms, the violence and killings of innocent civilians, including women and children. Today we can only repeat, in sadness and horror at the further deterioration, the same condemnation and deep concern.

We cannot but deeply deplore the killing of the Israeli hostage, confirmed only yesterday, and the continued holding of an Israeli soldier as a hostage. The killing of a hostage is a barbaric act that cannot be justified and serves no purpose towards peace.

We equally deeply deplore the increasing number of victims among the civilian population in Gaza and the West Bank and the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis. The suffering of the Palestinian civilian population has reached new alarming levels. We call upon Israel to exercise utmost restraint in dealing with the current crisis.

Let me reiterate some basic points.

We continue to believe that, in taking measures to defend itself, Israel must respect its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. In that respect, we repeat our call upon Israel for proportionate use of force.

We are particularly concerned over the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature, and about the way it was carried out by the Israeli army. The international community has long invested in democratic institution-building as part of our shared efforts towards the creation of a viable and democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. It is very important to preserve the viability and continuity of those institutions.

We also continue to believe that it is imperative that the Palestinian Government take effective and immediate strong action to improve security and to prevent terrorist attacks against Israel. We call upon them to immediately release the abducted Israeli soldier. The Hamas-led Government needs to meet and implement the principles set out by the Quartet of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations.

In this dire situation, we welcome Prime Minister Olmert's and President Abbas's pledge to carry out negotiations, and commend the efforts of the latter to unite all Palestinian political forces to work towards achieving the widest possible consensus in support of the objectives of the road map. In that respect, the conclusion, in the last few days, of a national agreement reached by all Palestinian factions with the exception of the Islamic Jihad movement should be a step in the right direction.

Greece remains committed to striving for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as on the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

We call upon Israel to refrain from any and all unilateral actions that could prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations and threaten the viability of a two-State solution.

At this particular critical juncture, we should not lose sight of the bigger picture, and we should not allow ourselves to become distracted from our main goal, which is to create the necessary conditions for the re-launching, as soon possible, of the peace process and the return to the road map.

Mr. Li Kexin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, we would like to thank Ms. Kane for her briefing.

We are deeply disturbed by the recent escalation of tension between Israel and Palestine. China has consistently advocated the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute through peaceful means. We oppose any military action that would cause casualties among innocent civilians. We hope that both Israel and Palestine will be able to show the utmost restraint and rationality and take immediate action to put an end to the vicious circle of violence for violence, so as to prevent a further destabilization of the situation in the region.

Every Government has the right to protect the life and security of its citizens. However, any action taken should conform to international law. Israel has resorted to unilateral force, and its action has been taken at the expense of the lives of many innocent Palestinian civilians. It has even detained democratically elected Palestinian Government officials. The international community cannot accept such actions. Israel must put an end to its operations.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority should endeavour to bring about the immediate release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier, in accordance with the interests of the Palestinian people.

China notes that the conflict tension between Israel and Palestine has caused many civilian casualties, thus aggravating the already fragile humanitarian situation in Palestine. Again, we appeal to Israel to respect international humanitarian law, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance by the international community to the Palestinian civilians and to avoid taking any action that would worsen the humanitarian situation in Palestine.

The recent rapid exacerbation of tension in Israel and Palestine again reminds us that the Middle East peace process should continue. Direct dialogue between the two parties should be resumed at an early date. Bloody lessons remind us that hatred and violence will not bring about peace. We urge the leadership of Palestine and Israel to proceed in the interests of their peoples, guided by the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the principle of land for peace, to restore political confidence as soon as possible and to resolve all disputes through dialogue.

It is our hope that the international community can take practical action and, in a constructive manner, help Palestine and Israel emerge from this difficult situation. The Security Council bears special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and should therefore play a more active role in that regard.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset to thank Ms. Angela Kane for the information she presented to the Council. We agree with her that we now face a grave crisis — not an ordinary crisis such as that to which, sadly, we are accustomed in the region. This meeting is occurring at a time when the security and humanitarian situation in the Middle East is deteriorating in an alarming manner. The events of recent days have the potential to destabilize the entire region. My country is extremely concerned by the situation and thus appeals to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take urgent measures to de-escalate the conflict in order to prevent a large-scale confrontation.

The abduction of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by extremist Palestinian groups is an unacceptable and provocative act. We reiterate our appeal to the Palestinian Authority, immediately and without preconditions, to free him and hand him over, safe and sound, to the Israeli authorities. We also voice our concern at, and condemn, the abduction and killing of another Israeli citizen, in the West Bank, which occurred in the last few days. We believe those responsible for the death of innocent civilians should be brought to justice, as there can be no justification whatever for such acts.

Similarly, I would like to reiterate that the Palestinian Authority must take every possible measure to put an end to Qassam rocket attacks on Israeli territory launched from Gaza, in particular those that target the town of Sderot. In addition to those measures that must be taken by the Palestinian side, let us not forget that the conditions set out by the Quartet remain in force and must be complied with by the Hamas-led Government.

The Israeli Government also has significant obligations and responsibilities. Argentina is extremely concerned by the military operations being carried out in the Gaza Strip and by other Israeli activities that have affected the civilian population in the territory. The unilateral reoccupation of the Gaza Strip can only

fuel tension and violence. I believe that, as we have seen since September 2000, there can be no military solution to the conflict. We therefore believe that Israel must take a series of urgent measures to put an end to the military operations in the populated areas of Gaza. It must withdraw its troops from that territory back to their positions before the beginning of the current military campaign.

Similarly, we believe that all Israeli practices in contravention of international humanitarian law must cease, in particular those that violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. These include extrajudicial killings, destruction of infrastructure and housing and collective punishment. The detention of elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other Palestinian Government officials is an additional cause of concern. For that reason, we call upon the Israeli Government to reconsider its decision, as it could have extremely negative repercussions — including for the Government and the people of Israel.

We share the concern of the Secretary-General and of Mr. Egeland for the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Israel must take measures to prevent suffering among the Palestinian people, in particular by facilitating access for food, medical supplies and fuel. Similarly, measures must be taken to restore the supply of basic services such as electricity, on which the water supply and sanitation system for large parts of the population depend.

At the regional level, we feel it is imperative to put an end to all acts of provocation, of which there are many. All countries in the region must contribute to resolve the crisis. They must refrain from taking measures that would increase tension and must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their neighbours. We cannot fail to stress the necessity of avoiding any confrontation that could have destabilizing repercussions for the entire Middle East.

Throughout this process, the international community and the Security Council have a significant role to play. We cannot and must not remain indifferent when confronted by the renewed cycle of violence, reprisals and revenge. In this difficult situation, we hope the Security Council will remain cohesive and that it will send a clear and unambiguous message to all parties, emphasizing that the only way to a solution to the Middle East conflict is through good-faith negotiations based upon the resolutions adopted by the Council, the Madrid terms of reference, earlier agreements and the principle of land for peace.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for the valuable information she shared with us.

My delegation regrets the escalation of armed violence between Israel and the Hamas-led Government of the Palestinian Authority. We condemn the unnecessary and provocative military operation, for which Hamas was responsible: the attack, through a tunnel, on an Israeli military post, in which two members of the Israeli armed forces were killed and a third abducted. We call for the immediate and unconditional freeing of the Israeli soldier. We also condemn the kidnapping and killing of another Israeli citizen in the West Bank and the constant firing of Qassam rockets.

At the same time, we call upon Israel to cease its attacks in Gaza, in particular against infrastructure such as power stations. Such attacks jeopardize water and food supplies and could cause a critical humanitarian situation, as Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, recently stated. Similarly, my delegation agrees with what the Group of Eight, meeting in Moscow, has said. Additionally, we express our concern about the detention of elected officials of the Palestinian Authority.

We agree that it is urgent for the Quartet, at the highest level, to act resolutely to bring about a permanent ceasefire and to ensure that the kidnapped Israeli soldier is returned and that detained Palestinian Authority officials are freed. We call upon both sides to end the violence, but we insist that Hamas accept the call by the Quartet and the Security Council that it recognize Israel, end acts of violence and abide by obligations previously undertaken by the Palestinian Authority.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Denmark.

Let me start by joining others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her update on the situation in the Middle East. Furthermore, Denmark fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Like other delegations, Denmark is deeply concerned about the current deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East. In particular, we are concerned at the situation on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel following the attack by militant Palestinians, the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit of the Israel Defense Forces and the killing of a young Israeli settler. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit and urge the Palestinian leadership to undertake all necessary efforts in that regard.

We also call on Israel to exercise utmost restraint in the current crisis. The detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature gives rise to particular concern.

All parties must do their utmost to avoid further escalation. The parties should not let themselves be provoked further. Additional violence will only serve to promote the agendas of extremists. Hopes for a resumption of political dialogue after the recent positive signals, including the meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, must not be dashed.

As set out by the Quartet, the Hamas-led Palestinian Government needs to meet and implement the three principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations.

In view of the urgent need to re-launch the process towards a negotiated two-State solution which would bring peace to both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, we call for early engagement between the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority. We reiterate our expectation that both parties will respect existing agreements and obligations, including the road map.

Moreover, we call on the Palestinian Government to bring terrorist violence to an end. We condemn the extremist groups responsible for these acts and all those who jeopardize the prospects for peace.

Finally, we call on all parties to protect all civilians and not to add to their suffering. We urge them to assume once again their full responsibility to restore security, allowing for the resumption of the peace process and for a return to the road map.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour and a privilege for me, Madam President, on behalf of the Group of Arab States at the United Nations, to commend you for the manner in which you are guiding the work of the Council this month and to thank you for your prompt response to the call for the convening of this meeting.

The Arab Group called for this emergency meeting because of the grave developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to enjoy full impunity and has, in its habitual manner, carried out aggression in the West Bank and launched an incursion into Gaza, employing its full military might, targeting innocent Palestinian civilians. It has detained a number of cabinet ministers of the elected Palestinian Government as well as legislators, in violation of all relevant rules and norms of international law. This sets a most dangerous precedent.

Israel has destroyed vital infrastructure such as power and water stations, thus further complicating the lives of 1.5 million Palestinian civilians, who were already the victims of the collective punishment meted out by the occupation authorities. It is leading the area into a cycle of violence.

In an expansion of its aggression, Israel has violated the sovereign airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic, thus posing a threat to international peace and security and to the security of the region. We vigorously condemn these policies.

This aggression may be added to the long list of acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and violations of their fundamental human rights that Israel has been committing for decades. All of these countless illegal and illegitimate Israeli practices violate international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions adopted since 1967 by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The aggression — which Israel launched on the flimsiest of pretexts — is aimed at destroying all diplomatic efforts to ease tension. Indeed, it is a classic example of the State terrorism that Israel pursues. More than ever before, the international community is thus called upon to work at all levels to halt policies of double standards and to endeavour to put an end to this aggression.

The Security Council must compel Israel to withdraw immediately from Gaza and all the other occupied territories and to cease all military operations. The Council should also provide international protection to the Palestinian people, in conformity with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949, and relevant international law. It should ensure that the Government of Israel, as the occupying Power, assumes full responsibility for the safety of detainees and abductees in Israeli prisons and should demand the immediate release of the detained Palestinian ministers and legislators.

The Quartet, being the guardian of the road map, should assume its responsibilities and seek a decisive and just position in order to put an end to the continuous Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and to expedite the operation of the assistance mechanism that has been approved, and not to delay its implementation in view of the tragic conditions that the Palestinian people are facing.

It is well known that the root cause of the problem is the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the policies of blockade that are being imposed on the Palestinian people. The just and comprehensive peace to which the people of the region aspire is a whole that can never be realized without a total withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the Shab'a Farms, and without a return to the 4 June 1967 borders.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Araghchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Madam President, I wish to begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the Council presidency for the month of June. I congratulate Ambassador Ikouebe of the Congo and the Congolese delegation for their able stewardship of the Council in May. I also thank you, Madam President, for convening this open meeting on an issue which truly threatens international peace and security.

Once more, the international community is witnessing yet another military invasion by the Zionist army against the innocent Palestinian people, which goes on in flagrant defiance of the most basic principles of international law and the fundamental provisions of the United Nations Charter.

Warplanes, tanks and thousands of troops, invading the Gaza Strip, have targeted civilians and purely civilian infrastructures, destroying three main bridges, disabling the only power plant, making main roads impassable and bombarding the Strip with heavy artillery fire and fire from the air. The aggressors are thus depriving the civilians of basic necessities and, by severely damaging the water supply system, raising the spectre of epidemics and health disasters.

With the Palestinian economy already strangulated under an unjust embargo since January and the Palestinians remaining under siege even after the occupiers' withdrawal from Gaza, the new aggression threatens to inflict further enormous suffering on civilians and exacerbates the situation within the Palestinian territory and in the region.

Given the situation in the occupied territory, the excuse invoked by the invaders to justify the enormous suffering that is being inflicted upon Palestinian civilians is devoid of any ground and plausibility. Nothing could justify the acts perpetrated by the invading army, which run grossly counter to the basic tenets of international law. Likewise, it should not be overlooked that thousands of Palestinians, including many women and children, are unjustifiably suffering in the occupiers' jails for extended periods of time.

There should be no doubt that the new round of aggression pursues more important political and strategic objectives, which include the undermining of the democratically elected Palestinian Government. The abduction and illegal detention of dozens of Palestinian cabinet ministers and members of the Palestinian parliament who took office as a result of a free and fair election clearly attests to this fact. It is ironic that those who claim to be seeking to promote democracy in the region are now looking approvingly upon this ongoing repression.

It is depressing that the occupying forces and the United States as their main supporter have continuously failed to learn from their historic blunder. After more than fifty years they still hope to force the Palestinian people into submission by employing means such as those being currently resorted to in the occupied territory. It is very unfortunate that they fail to understand that only the restoration of justice could remedy the grievances and lead to the reinstatement of

peace and normalcy in the region. Neither, apparently, do they understand that the oppression they impose upon a whole nation is one of the root causes of many global problems with which the international community is grappling.

We are also concerned over the implications of the new aggression for the whole region. Violating Syria's airspace and threatens to hit targets inside that country are equally disturbing. The new aggressive posture stands to create more instability and tension and threatens to further destabilize the situation in the region. Thus the crisis, if unchecked, may tip towards escalation and engulf the whole region.

While strongly condemning this latest Zionist criminal act, we believe that aggression that targets civilians and civilian infrastructures is both an act of collective punishment and war crimes in defiance of international humanitarian law. Thus it is imperative that the international community get involved in an effective manner and prevent the continuation of those terrorist designs against the Palestinians.

The impunity with which the Zionists have been allowed to carry out their crimes has undoubtedly emboldened them to continue on the same path. Therefore it is high time for the international community to take effective measures to protect and enforce the most basic rights of the Palestinian people and to help put an end to the vicious cycle of violence brought about by the persistent illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. We believe that an end to the occupation, the formation of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland is the only solution to the enduring Palestinian crisis.

This Council has an important role to play in this regard and should act with a view to preventing the occupying regime from continuing to flout the will of the international community, incorporated in numerous resolutions of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Conference. As the ongoing aggression seriously threatens international peace and security, the Security Council has an enormous responsibility under the United Nations Charter to take necessary and prompt steps with a view to putting an end to the aggression.

It is very unfortunate — in fact, distressing — that the United States has not been able to fulfil its responsibility and obligations in this regard, particularly as a permanent member of the Security Council. The United States, by use of its veto right, has continuously prevented this Council from acting effectively to protect the Palestinian people.

We hope that, recognizing the need to take decisive action in the face of this new escalation in the region, all members of the Council will live up to their responsibilities in properly addressing the grave situation created in the wake of the latest aggression.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me to begin by thanking the Assistant Secretary-General, Ms. Angela Kane, for her briefing and to express my appreciation of and support for the statement made by the delegate of Algeria on behalf of the Arab Group and the statements to be made by Zimbabwe on behalf of the African Group and by Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Security Council meets today as the occupied Palestinian territories are witnessing grave escalation by Israeli military forces. That escalation threatens to widen the scope of violence and counter-violence and diminishes the prospects for security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This escalation undermines the peace process, in whose success we all have a stake and which is aimed at the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side with the State of Israel.

In recent days, Israel has been carrying out a succession of military attacks against the Palestinian people, killing many civilians, in particular children. Those attacks escalated to the full-scale operation that Israel launched two days ago against the Palestinian territories, in particular the Gaza Strip, from which it had recently unilaterally withdrawn. Infrastructure has been targeted, including power plants, bridges and water pipelines, thereby threatening humanitarian tragedy for more than 1.5 million Palestinian citizens in Gaza. The occupation force did not stop there. It has detained many Palestinian officials, including cabinet members and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, who were elected an electoral process that was certified by the international community as being fair.

In legal terms, these attacks can only be viewed as a flagrant violation by Israel of international law and

international humanitarian law. The Security Council must therefore do everything possible to provide the Palestinians with international protection, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949. Israel, as the occupying Power, must be held responsible for its actions.

The current situation requires that the Security Council assume its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. It must take immediate measures to stop the situation from deteriorating further, as that could widen the scope of the conflict regionally, especially given that Israeli has begun to provoke neighbouring Arab countries, in particular Syria, thereby risking an expansion of the confrontation.

Egypt therefore believes that we must take immediate steps to defuse the tension. First, the Israeli and Palestinian parties should adopt mutual measures to calm the situation and return it to the status quo ante. Secondly, Israeli must immediately withdraw from the territories that it entered in the Gaza Strip and put an end to its military operations in all of the occupied Palestinian territories. It must release the Palestinian officials that it has detained and make a commitment not to commit acts of aggression against civilians in future.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must commit itself to making every effort to guarantee the immediate release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier and to put an end to the launching of missiles into Israel, provided that Israeli ends its military operations and withdraws its forces from Gaza.

Fourthly, the Quartet should undertake immediate measures to build confidence between the two sides in preparation for final status negotiations on the basis of the terms of reference of the peace process, the principle of land for peace, the Oslo Agreement, the Sharm el-Sheikh understanding, the road map and all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The Arab peoples have truly lost patience with the international community's failure to confront repeated violations by Israel, which it commits with impunity. We have had enough of the double standards that are applied in this situation, whereby a Palestinian person and an Israeli person are not given equal value. Our crises and tragedies do not arouse any interest. Some would promote Israel's right to self-defence even if it leads Israel to renege on all of its international commitments, to reoccupy parts of the Gaza Strip and to violate the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people. Those rights are guaranteed by international law, and we are all working to enhance the role of the United Nations and its ability to guarantee respect for human rights, which all people should be able to enjoy.

The Security Council, the Quartet and every State member of the Security Council must understand that the solution consists in an end to the occupation, the achievement of stability and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, through negotiations. That is the basis of the Arab peace initiative, launched in 2002. That initiative remains the only realistic basis for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and the countries aligning themselves with this statement.

The European Union is extremely concerned about the situation which has evolved in recent days between Israel and the Palestinians, and it calls on all parties to abstain from any actions that are in violation of international law. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier. The European Union strongly condemns the murder of the Israeli victim of a kidnapping in the West Bank. We call on the Palestinian leadership to put an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets at Israeli territory.

We express our particular concern about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature. Those detained should be accorded their full legal rights. The European Union reminds all parties of their responsibility to protect civilian lives. Notwithstanding Israel's legitimate right of self-defence, ongoing military operations should be in accordance with international law. We call on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint and to avoid disproportionate action. We regret the destruction of essential infrastructure, which is contributing to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Restoring electricity and water supplies and access for humanitarian organizations must be a priority now in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis.

The European Union emphasizes the primacy of diplomatic means and calls upon all parties in the region to make every effort possible to resolve the current situation by peaceful means. We reaffirm our conviction that only a negotiated two State solution can bring peace and security to the Israeli and Palestinian people. A return to the peace process and to the implementation of the road map is therefore imperative. We ask that both parties meet their responsibilities and demonstrate urgently an active commitment to the search for a negotiated solution.

On 15 June, our heads of State or Government endorsed a proposed temporary international mechanism to channel assistance directly to the Palestinian people, which has been drawn up by the European Commission following consultations within the EU, as well as with Quartet members, major donors, international financial institutions and partners in the region. The European Union, through the European Commission, will continue urgently to establish the mechanism, in conjunction with Quartet members, other key international partners and the Palestinian Authority President's Office.

We agree that, in order to have an immediate impact, the mechanism will focus on essential supplies and running costs for social services and health case, supply of utilities, including fuel, and social allowances. Other donors, including Arab States, are invited to provide funding and to consider early and substantial contributions. The European Union will contribute a substantial amount to the international mechanism.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Rahman (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Non-Aligned Movement believes that the Palestinian question, including East Jerusalem, continues to have fundamental importance for peace and security in the Middle East and in the world at large. The Movement remains committed to a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Further, it remains supportive of the Palestinian people in exercising their inalienable right to self-determination for an independent and sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital and for their freedom and dignity. The Movement reaffirms its support for the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, the illegality of any territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force, and the road map.

The Non-Aligned Movement is gravely concerned about the current, deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip, which has escalated in the past few days. We condemn the kidnapping and detention by Israel of Palestinian cabinet ministers, members of the Legislative Council and other officials. At the same time, we condemn the kidnapping and detention by Palestinian militants of an Israeli soldier. We strongly condemn the killings — including the extrajudicial killings — and wounding of civilians as a result of recent events. Further, we strongly condemn the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel against the Palestinians and acts of violence and terrorism carried out by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilians.

In the light of the current situation in the region, the Movement urges Israel in particular to exercise maximum restraint and to ensure respect for its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. The Movement further urges both sides to take all necessary measures to stop the vicious circle of violence, which has caused a great number of casualties and a great amount of destruction to public infrastructure and property.

The release by both sides of all recently kidnapped and detained individuals is a crucial first step to de-escalate the worsening situation in the region. The kidnapping and counter-kidnapping of officials must be checked lest it become a dangerous trend in the future that would be difficult to deal with.

In that connection, the Non-Aligned Movement urges the Security Council, bearing in mind its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, to immediately intervene by demanding that both sides release all recently kidnapped and detained individuals and by compelling Israel to, inter alia, cease its campaign of aggression in the Gaza Strip, abide by its obligations under international law and immediately cease its military attacks against Palestinian civilians and its destruction of civilian property and infrastructure. The Council should support and assist efforts by President

Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to prevail upon groups in its territories to halt all rocket attacks against Israel and attacks against Israeli civilians. The Movement urges both sides to act in conformity with international law and to refrain from taking steps that could further escalate the violence and aggravate the already tense situation in the region.

It is incumbent upon both Israel and Palestine, in their own interest and with the assistance of the international community, to create the conditions necessary for a resumption of negotiations to seek a just, durable and comprehensive final settlement. That entails, in particular, denouncing violent measures and acts of terrorism and revoking unilateral actions by Israel that could further undermine peace and stability in the region. In that context, the Movement is confident that the Quartet will continue to intensify its efforts to achieve the full and honest implementation of the road map.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses the necessity of upholding international law and the Charter of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine. The Movement further stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects. The Council is in a position to prevail upon Israel and Palestine to be fully committed to a just, lasting and comprehensive final settlement. The Council bears the primary responsibility for ensuring that they move in that direction. As the Movement has stated in the past, the Council must not be reluctant to invoke its authority and power, especially on this question, for the sake of establishing peace for the Palestinians and the Israelis, for the sake of the people in the region and to serve and meet the collective interest and desire of our global family of nations.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Zoubi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to congratulate you, Madam, on your leadership of the Security Council during this month and to thank your predecessor for his guidance of the work of the Council last month.

We condemn Israel's insistence on pursuing its vast military operations against Palestinian civilians; those operations are totally unjustified. We also condemn the collective punishment imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people in Gaza. We condemn violence and the killing of civilians anywhere. The recent developments are extremely unfortunate and do not serve peace and stability in the region.

We had hoped that all the parties — particularly the Israeli party — would display a high level of restraint, because we all know the political difficulties and security challenges in the region in general. What the Israeli occupation forces are doing in Gaza after their unilateral withdrawal only weakens the chances for the success of the political process and heightens the atmosphere of violence and extremism.

Today we hope that the Security Council will send a strong and clear message that this unproductive and negative situation, brought about by irresponsible measures, must cease. Our efforts must focus on de-escalation, the creation of trust between the two parties and the immediate implementation of the road map. A failure by the Council to send that message and to turn the parties in the right direction will not stop the deterioration of the situation or save the worsening political process caused by the tensions and the delays in efforts to put an end to the current deadlock. The international community's responsibility is paramount in the implementation of the road map. I wish to recall that the Government of Jordan is making every effort to put an end to this dangerous escalation.

We call upon the Palestinian and Israeli parties to respect all the agreements signed, as well as the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement, and to cease all measures of escalation, whether they be rocket firings, incursions, arrests or kidnappings. We call upon both parties to focus on the political process.

We look forward with great interest to the outcome of the Palestinian investigation into the prisoners' document and of the reconciliation dialogue. We call upon all Palestinian parties to serve the high interest of the Palestinian people. We would like to commend the sincere efforts of President Abbas to activate the political process. We welcome the positive measures taken by both parties, such as the meeting held at Petra in March during the meeting of Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to all practices that violate the human rights of the Palestinian people and to occupation measures such as permanent restrictions on, and military action against, the Palestinian people; ongoing colonization; and the

building of the separation wall. Indeed, all of those actions, which have been condemned, prevent the Palestinian Authority from respecting and fulfilling its commitments under the road map, especially in the difficult political context that prevails in the occupied Palestinian territories, as they have created a humanitarian crisis and threaten to create a security crisis as well. We call for a speedy reactivation of the mechanism by the Quartet through cooperation with the Palestinian Authority.

A settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will require an end to Israeli occupation and must be based on the principles of international legality and an agreed solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We must demonstrate political will and work to put an end to this escalation and resume negotiations. Unilateral solutions will never produce a lasting peace between the two peoples.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of Yemen, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you on presiding over the work of the Council for this month. Given our friendship, we are fully aware of your wisdom, and we know that you are a person of vision. Allow me also to express our gratitude and appreciation to your predecessor, the Ambassador of Congo, for the manner in which he conducted the work of the Council during the month of May.

We would like to endorse the statement made by the representative of Algeria, who spoke on behalf of the Arab Group, and the statement made by the representative of Malaysia, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

To those I would like to add the following.

The Security Council is meeting once again to put an end to the arrogance of Israeli might. The Council knows full well that this is not the first time that the forces of the Israeli occupation have practiced State violence against a defenceless people. Israel has bombed densely populated cities and refugee camps — refugees it has displaced from their lands.

What is new here is that the Israeli forces have taken their acts of aggression to new heights by killing innocent civilians on the Gaza shore, destroying Palestinian infrastructure, kidnapping Cabinet ministers and Palestinian officials, and intensifying the scale of its aggression by sending its warplanes to violate the airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic, with a view to destabilizing the region and pushing it into a state of war — as if our region was lacking in tragedy.

The Republic of Yemen condemns the acts of aggression committed against the occupied Palestinian territories. It condemns also the violation by Israeli warplanes of Syrian airspace and requests that an end be put to such acts of aggression, that the Israeli forces withdraw to their previous positions, and that the Cabinet ministers and Palestinian officials who were detained be released, as they were elected in free and democratic elections. We call once again for respect for the inviolability of Syrian airspace.

It is strange indeed that these Israeli acts of aggression follow on the heels of the Palestinian national reconciliation movement, aimed at allowing Palestinians to speak with one voice and responding to the internationally agreed provisions related to the peace process in the region. It has become clear that the military actions and threats began prior to the detention of the Israeli soldier, which has been used by Israel as a pretext for its acts of aggression. This shows that Israel does not really seek peace. Perhaps it cannot live without triggering disputes and conflicts in the region as a justification for usurping and annexing additional Palestinian territory so as to establish settlements there, bringing settlers from all parts of the world.

Israel persists in this behaviour because it knows full well that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, are paralysed. Not only that, it enjoys protection from punishment. No one even questions what it does or its actions, which run counter to international law and to divine codes.

We would like to stress once again that, in order to achieve peace and stability, pressure must be brought to bear on Israel to respect international instruments. Israel should be stopped. It cannot continue to act as if it were above the law. Israel's crimes generate hatred and incite violence and tension in the region.

We are convinced that any defenceless people subjected to intermittent acts of aggression would definitely feel frustrated and hopeless. Frustration generates hatred and terror. Terror feeds on an

environment in which there is no justice or fairness. The international community must therefore put an end to Israel's acts of aggression and hold Israel accountable. It also should work to speedily implement final status negotiations in accordance with internationally binding resolutions, the decisions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, my delegation appreciates your prompt response in convening this meeting of the Security Council on an important and delicate issue that has been on the Council's agenda for decades, without any real enthusiasm ever having been shown to resolve it.

The Security Council is meeting today as the dangerous situation in the Middle East deteriorates from bad to worse as a result of arrogant Israeli practices that know no limits because of the lack of any moral, humanitarian or international deterrence to its practices, which constitute a real threat to international peace and security.

Israel, which has never abided by internationally binding resolutions, is trying to drag the whole region into a cycle of violence by expanding the scope of its aggression in the Middle East. The fact that Israeli warplanes penetrated Syrian airspace is a blatant violation of the sovereignty of an independent State and an unjustified provocation to that State, as well as a flagrant violation of international law. Moreover, Israel's sweeping aggression against the Palestinian Gaza Strip and West Bank is a war crime for which it should be held to account, in conformity with international law. Such acts of aggression represent an unacceptable and unjustifiable provocation and direct hostility for purposes and reasons that are well known. They reflect Israel's internal failures and its efforts to export its problems and to shirk the prerequisites of a just and comprehensive peace, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations.

The events of the past few hours have shown that Israel's intentions in withdrawing from the Gaza Strip were never genuine or sincere. Israel has only been waiting for an excuse to re-invade Gaza and to pursue its aggressive policies against the Palestinian people. The destruction of Palestinian infrastructure that provides for the basic needs of the people of the Gaza Strip is a violation of international humanitarian law, and more specifically of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

Israel's exacerbation of the situation throughout the area is compounded by its attempts to provoke Syria. Worse than its daily violation of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions concerning the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel has no qualms about levelling charges and allegations against other parties as a smokescreen for the war crimes it perpetrates every day against an unarmed population.

Our past experience with the Security Council is a cause of concern, given the Council's repeated failure to assume its responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security in the Middle East, a very important and sensitive part of the world. The question here is: Why does the situation in the Middle East continue to deteriorate in a cycle of violence? The answer is to be found in the ongoing Israeli occupation and aggression, as well as in the Council's being prevented from taking up its mandate and a lack of earnest in the search for a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is our hope that the Security Council will today be able to assume its responsibilities for the humanitarian catastrophe being imposed on the Palestinian people as a result of the destruction of their infrastructure through the bombing of their water supplies, electric power stations and bridges. The international community expects the Security Council to take a firm stance against the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, in conformity with its Charter mandate to maintain international peace and security.

In his statement today, the Ambassador of the United States attacked my country in a most unacceptable manner, making baseless allegations and presenting himself as a defender of Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people. The representative of the United States is the last person who can claim the right to make such allegations, especially since the policies of the United States, which are biased towards Israel and distort the facts, support extremism and terrorism throughout the world. The United States provides cover for Israel in the Security Council as it

pursues its aggressive and destructive policies against the Palestinian people. That will never serve the cause of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. It will lead only to further tension and the deterioration of the situation there.

Moreover, the repeated allegations made by the representative of Israel against Syria and others concerning their purported sponsorship and support of terrorism are highly ironic. He merely seeks to distract us from the war crimes and terrorism perpetrated daily by his own Government against the unarmed Palestinian people. Israel's destructive military operations of recent days represent yet further evidence of the State terrorism it practices in the occupied Arab territories. Israel must be held accountable, in conformity with the provisions of international law.

Israel has displaced millions of Palestinians, who are now refugees in many countries throughout the world, including Syria, which has provided them with that which Israel has denied them. Israel has denied them their basic right to return to their homeland, which it has turned into military encampments and illegitimate settlements. It denies them even their right of self-expression and their aspirations to an independent, sovereign State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, we are witnessing the escalation of Israeli military attacks against the Palestinian people. There appears to be no end to the barbarity.

Under the pretext of the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by the Palestinian resistance to occupation, in the early hours of 28 June Israel launched a large-scale military attack on the Gaza Strip, mobilizing nearly 5,000 soldiers, hundreds of tanks and other military means. The occupying forces attacked the main power plant of the area, cutting off electricity from nearly half of the territory, indiscriminately bombing a number of bridges that connect the various sections of the Strip, re-occupying large areas in the southern part of the territory, and arresting numerous prominent individuals from the Government of the Palestinian Authority and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

That inhuman and criminal aggression was unleashed at a time when an agreement had been reached between the Palestinian political forces that would have contributed to relaunching the peace negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Cuba also vigorously rejects the violation of the airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic by Israeli military aircraft. That, together with the barbaric actions carried out against the Gaza Strip, has exposed the region yet again to a dangerous escalation of violence that endangers international peace and security. As in the past, Israel has acted with the arrogance and impunity that it derives from the economic and military support and the permanent veto power of the United States in the Security Council.

On 29 June, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba issued a statement expressing its strongest condemnation of this most recent Israeli military aggression. It called upon the international community and peace-loving forces to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops, an end to Israel's State terrorism, respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the return of refugees, and the unconditional restoration of all Arab territories occupied in June 1967. Those steps represent the only way to achieve a fair and lasting peace for all the peoples of that stricken region.

Israel's new escalation further aggravates the already critical humanitarian situation in the illegally occupied territories, further exacerbating the financial blackmail of the Palestinian authorities and people, which is an element of political pressure to gain concessions.

The Security Council must act without delay. This body cannot remain a silent accomplice in the light of these grave developments.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming the unwavering commitment of the people and Government of Cuba to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and all Arab peoples, and by reiterating our firm belief that, sooner rather than later, the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State will become a reality.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Own: (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you,

Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are confident that the President's experience and wisdom will enable her to make a great contribution to the promotion of international peace and security. I also cannot fail to thank her predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Congo, for wisely presiding over the work of the Council last month. I must also thank your delegation for its quick response to the request to hold this important meeting to discuss an extremely important matter that will have serious consequences for international peace and security in the region, in particular, and in the world in general.

Serious developments have arisen from the barbaric ongoing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which culminated in the premeditated invasion and flagrant attack referred to as Operation Summer Rains — which was carried out on 28 June, targeting innocent civilians, power stations, bridges and other Palestinian Authority infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank — and from the detention of several members of the Government and of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Those acts are violations of international norms and laws, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The international community, especially the Security Council and its permanent members, should assume the moral and legal responsibility to stand up to that cowardly and shameful action. They should exercise their responsibility and denounce and condemn the premeditated and organized military campaign by the Israeli occupying forces against the unarmed Palestinian people. They should consider that aggression a crime and an act of collective punishment exemplifying international terrorism and proof positive of Israel's designs to counter any efforts at peace and a just solution of this chronic crisis.

The international community, including the Security Council, should not be fooled by the claims made by Israeli occupying forces to justify their aggression as a response to the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier or a means of self-defence. That aggression was planned and carefully considered for weeks, as confirmed by the Haaretz newspaper on its Internet web site — to the effect that the occupying army and the general security apparatus, the Shabak, had planned for weeks to detain the leaders of the Hamas movement and had sought special orders from Israeli courts under the signature of Attorney General Menachem Mazuz. That confirms that this was a premeditated act of aggression that has nothing to do with the claim of self-defence. Self-defence cannot take place in occupied territory, in which — in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights norms and practices and resolutions of international legitimacy — any intervention is a flagrant act of aggression against the rights of the Palestinian people.

The deterioration in the situation and the increasing complexity of the problems in the region are the result of Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, its enforcement of a policy of creating a fait accompli and its adoption of continued criminal practices against civilians. They are also the result of Israel's siege and collective punishment of the Palestinian people and its intimidation of certain neighbouring Arab countries. Those actions by the Israeli authorities are tantamount to piracy and are a serious violation of the inviolability of a sovereign Arab country, namely, Syria. They are also intended to provide cover for the barbaric crimes of Israeli forces in the occupied territories, and to serve as a means of reaffirming Israel's continuing policy of aggression and unjustified attacks in violation of international laws and norms.

In the face of those serious challenges and threats to international peace and security, and in the face of this organized invasion of the territory and headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, we would request the Security Council to exercise its responsibility as follows.

First, the Council should ensure adequate international protection for the Palestinian people and their legislative authority, in implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and other relevant international laws.

Secondly, the Council should hold the Israeli occupying authorities responsible for the safety of all detainees, prisoners of war and kidnapped persons in Israeli prisons and detention centres, and call for their immediate release.

Thirdly, the Security Council should condemn Israel's aggression against Gaza and the West Bank and put an end to it and to any violations or acts of piracy against Syrian air space.

Fourthly, the Council should call for the provision of international assistance for the Palestinian people and ensure that such aid reaches them as quickly as possible.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): We are assembled here this afternoon to focus on the increasingly dangerous situation in the Middle East, about which my delegation is highly concerned.

Israel has mounted a major indiscriminate offensive in Gaza. In the words of the BBC,

> "Israel's operations in Gaza and the West Bank appear to have as their aim not just an increase in pressure to get the release of its captured soldier but the weakening of the Hamas Government."

In the course of the past few days, Israel has captured cabinet ministers and taken many other democratically elected Hamas legislators. Furthermore, the Israeli air force has hit over 30 targets in the Gaza Strip so far, including the Palestinian Ministry of the Interior. Also, earlier today, one of those air strikes hit a civilian car on the main road in Gaza City, injuring two people. On the ground in southern Gaza, thousands of heavily armed Israeli soldiers have taken up positions and are primed for action.

The power supply has almost completely disappeared following the disabling of two of the remaining electrical relay stations in the blasts. The destruction of the Palestinian territory's main power transformer on Tuesday had already left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity and hampered the water supply, thereby pushing the territory to the edge of a humanitarian crisis.

In our view, if the objective is truly to see the return of a captured soldier, this is not only aggression; it is also a grave violation of international law. The standoff between the Palestinian leadership and the Israelis is threatening to explode, and it is appropriate that the Security Council is meeting to reflect on this issue. In the interests of international peace and security it is crucial that this Council take action to prevent further deterioration of the situation. Otherwise, mistrust between the parties will increase and will make the return to peace negotiations more difficult to achieve.

Regrettably, this heavily disproportionate use of force can in no way advance the interests of peace. This heavy-handedness is about the show of brutal military force, not about getting back a captured soldier. My delegation therefore condemns it without reservation. This is particularly significant, given that the Hamas-led Government has indicated that it is considering important policy changes.

The delegation of Indonesia calls on the Security Council to act urgently to have Israel pull out of Gaza without delay and cease its military operations without preconditions. Both sides should be urged to resolve by peaceful means the issue of the kidnapped soldier, as well as the matter of the release of all recently kidnapped and detained Palestinians. My delegation makes this suggestion conscious of the fact that this is a very sensitive point on the road to peace. However, it must be remembered that the longer the current stalemate goes, the worse the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory will be. Already, the Palestinians' quality of life has been deteriorating following Israel's refusal to remit taxes collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

We call on Israel to resist the temptation to escalate the crisis. It must focus on the objective of lasting peace through the full implementation of the road map. We reiterate that there can be no military resolution of the conflict. We must repeat that only the realization of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side within secure, internationally recognized borders, as provided for in resolution 1397 (2002), can end the perpetual violence and mistrust in the occupied territories.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Maqungo (South Africa): At the outset, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made by Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The South African Government is deeply concerned at the recent military incursion into northern and southern Gaza and the West Bank over the past few days, resulting in the destruction of critical infrastructure. The South African Government condemns the Israeli Government's policy of collective punishment, as it constitutes a direct violation of international law.

Israel's bombing campaign on 28 June 2006, which has continued unabated, has resulted in the destruction of strategic bridges and access roads, as well as of Gaza's only power plant, causing a cut in Gaza's water supply as it operates on an electrical pumping system. In his most recent report Professor John Dugard, a United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights, has highlighted the dire state of Gaza's medical facilities. The loss of Gaza's only power plant has now resulted in a lack of electricity and water for those critical facilities, which can only exacerbate the humanitarian crisis faced by ordinary Palestinians in Gaza. Although Israel has legitimate security concerns, they should not be addressed at the expense of international law and of the human rights of the Palestinian people.

The South African Government is again calling for caution with regard to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Furthermore, the unlawful arrests of Palestinian cabinet ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, are unacceptable, and we call for the immediate release of those individuals. The South African Government calls on the Israeli Government to stop its military offensive and to take all necessary measures to ensure that this situation is not further exacerbated. The South African Government is of the view that peace can be achieved only through a negotiated settlement, based on a two-State solution that provides for a sovereign Palestinian State and guarantees the right of Israel to live within secure borders.

The military intervention and the arrests of senior Palestinian leaders come at a time when many world leaders have been interacting with the Palestinian leaders to seek the release of Gilad Shalit. They also come hours after the historic Palestinian acceptance of a plan from leaders of all Palestinian factions. That was a major step forward and opened up real possibilities of ending violence and finding a two-State solution. Given that reality, how can anyone justify the invasion, arrests and massive destruction of Palestinian infrastructure? Sadly we have entered a very dangerous period that will threaten the stability of the region and international peace and security.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I now call on the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Madam President, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

I fully associate myself with the statements of the Arab Group and of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The occupied Palestinian territories in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank witness constant Israeli acts of aggression that target the innocent civilians and destroy infrastructure and vital economic installations of the Palestinian people. Those acts of aggression have not spared a number of Palestinian officials. The Israeli forces have arrested several cabinet ministers and members of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly.

At the same time we are hearing, yet again, Israeli claims that these military actions are just acts of self defence. Once again, Israel is going far beyond international standards of self-defence. Self-defence usually takes place in the territory of the State concerned, and not in territories under its occupation.

The Government and the people of Lebanon denounce the Israeli occupation forces' military campaign against the Palestinian people. Lebanon views this aggression as one more example of State terrorism — which is nothing new for Israel. In fact, Israel has never had any qualms about violating the sovereignty of other States, terrorizing innocent civilians, carrying out wanton acts of aggression or arresting innocent people.

Lebanon associates itself with the efforts of the Arab Group to compel the international community to take decisive steps to put an end to Israel's State terrorism against the entire Palestinian people. We

believe it is necessary to promptly take the following steps. First, the Security Council should swiftly take decisive steps to achieve a ceasefire and to restore security in the occupied Palestinian territories. It should guarantee international protection in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949, and other relevant instruments of international law.

Secondly, the Quartet must shoulder its political responsibilities and must accelerate the establishment of a mechanism to channel the assistance that has been pledged and to permit the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must immediately be permitted to restore the security situation, thereby enabling the Israeli and Palestinian parties to return to the negotiating table in order to deal with the current situation.

Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories constitute a flagrant violation of human rights, an act of aggression against the safety and security of the Palestinian people and against their right to a decent, dignified life in liberty. They also pose a challenge to the desire for peace in the region.

Israel's aggression is not confined to the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel has also heightened the readiness of its military forces along the Blue Line, again on the pretext of self-defence. Its air force has violated Syria's airspace and Israel continues to violate the airspace and territorial waters of Lebanon. Those repeated messages express Israel's aggressive intentions against the entire region. Israel continues to carry out acts of aggression against States that have consistently expressed their wish for the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Lebanon, while condemning Israel's wanton acts of aggression, joins in the call for a ceasefire, for a return to calm, for a resumption of negotiations, for the release of prisoners, and for an end to this round of bloody violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): Norway is following the dramatic situation in and around Gaza with deep concern. The situation is very serious. All parties must exercise the utmost restraint to prevent the situation from getting completely out of control. The abduction of the Israeli soldier and the killing of the young Israeli settler are unacceptable acts which we deplore. Such acts can only further aggravate the already precarious situation of Palestinian civilians.

We deeply deplore the arrest of lawfully elected Palestinian politicians. They need to be released immediately. Norway has repeatedly condemned Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. Israeli military operations in that densely populated area are endangering lives and causing suffering to the civilian population in Gaza. We therefore call on Israel to withdraw its forces as soon as possible. Norway is also deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza caused by Israeli attacks on vital infrastructure. Such collective punishment is unacceptable.

The current operations raise a number of issues of international law, whether they are police operations or military operations. According to international law, any use of violence shall be necessary and proportionate. Any countermeasures against the civilian population are unacceptable under international law. Israel must now help to restore water and energy supplies in Gaza, desist from any action that might damage vital infrastructure and show consideration for the Palestinian civilian population. Palestinian leaders have to make every effort to release the kidnapped Israeli soldier and bring to justice those responsible for the murder of the other Israeli citizen.

Norway urges the parties to show the greatest possible restraint and allow time for negotiations so that a peaceful solution to this serious situation can be found.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Sahel (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, Madam President, to express to you and to the other members of the Council our thanks and appreciation for your prompt response to the Arab Group's request to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council to consider the new escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also take this opportunity to thank Ms. Angela Kane for her presentation at the start of today's meeting.

My country is following with grave concern the serious situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the developments of the past few days. In the face

of the wave of destruction that has reached the institutions of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian infrastructure, the Government of Morocco cannot fail to deplore the escalation, the violence and the campaign carried out by the occupation authorities. Morocco calls for an immediate cessation of the intervention by the Israeli army.

The Israeli policy of escalation only further complicates the crisis with its targeting of Palestinian Authority officials and the arrest of cabinet ministers and other officials. We call for the release of all Palestinian officials arrested by the Israeli army and reiterate the need to put an immediate end to the violent campaign in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Kingdom of Morocco rejects completely Israel's dire approach to dealing with the crisis through a military escalation of the situation at the very time that the Palestinian factions had reached a political agreement that would facilitate the resumption of the peace process. While we recall that there is no alternative to dialogue, we reiterate that the Palestinian Authority President, cabinet ministers and Legislative Council members must be able to move freely within the territories of the Authority in order to facilitate political action.

Israeli provocations through violations of Syrian airspace portend a continuation of the cycle of violence and counter-violence. It constitutes a grave threat to international stability and security. In that context, Morocco calls upon the Security Council and the Quartet to take concrete measures to put an end to the Israeli operations against the occupied Palestinian territories and to bring about the withdrawal of the Israeli forces without delay, in order to return to the political process.

The Kingdom of Morocco continues to be hopeful, despite these difficult circumstances, that there is a possibility of reaching an end to violence in the region. The Government of Morocco is firmly convinced that negotiations are the best way to establish a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the road map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chidyausiku (Zimbabwe): Madam President, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the Council on behalf of the African Group on the topical subject of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. May I also commend the delegations of Algeria, in its capacity as Chair of the Group of Arab States, and of Qatar, for their timely call for this debate to bring the urgent attention and focus of the Council, and indeed the larger international community, on the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

The Group of African States wishes to join others in expressing its deep concern over the escalating tensions in the Middle East, which have seen Israeli military invasions of the Gaza Strip and the resulting wanton destruction of Government buildings, roads, bridges and power stations, the illegal arrest of elected representatives and threats to the lives of defenceless Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

The Group of African States sees this unfortunate development as a result of the lack of progress in addressing the major issues and in following up on core positions regarding the question of Palestine. The African Group condemns the ongoing excessive use of military might by Israel, which is disproportionate to the issues at hand, and demands that Israel immediately cease all violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

The African Group wishes to call on the Security Council to take urgent measures to bring the ongoing Israeli military invasion to an immediate halt in order to advance the peace process in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Chaudhry (Pakistan): Madam President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on steering the presidency of the Council for the month of June and for convening this important debate on the last day of your presidency.

Since the last public meeting in the Council on the situation of the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, definitive changes have taken place in the region. The recent surge of violence ensued after the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier on 25 June, and the massive military operation by the Israeli army that followed has seriously undermined the atmosphere of hope for peace that was built after

the elections in the Palestinian Authority and in Israel. This deadly violence has grave implications.

Pakistan regrets the Israeli incursion into Gaza, the total blockade of the Gaza Strip and the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure. We are concerned over the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestine that would further impede the international efforts to stop the cycle of violence and restart negotiations. Pakistan hopes that the international community will take the necessary steps to help resolve the crisis through peaceful means.

The challenge before the international community is three-fold: first, how to halt the present phase of massive human sufferings and chaos resulting from the military operations of Israeli army; secondly, how to maintain peace between Israel and Palestinians and resume negotiations for the lasting solution to the problem of the Middle East; and thirdly, how to prevent actions being taken by Israel that could unilaterally create realities, making a negotiated settlement based on the principle of land for peace completely impossible.

Indeed, there are no ready answers to these complex questions. Yet the United Nations, including the Security Council and the Secretary-General, must now play the central role in responding to these challenges. It is the moral obligation of the international community to call upon the two Governments to heed the call of their peoples and work constructively towards the attainment of peace.

In the context of the situation on the ground, I would like to make the following essential points. First, there should be an immediate cessation of hostilities with a view to finding a diplomatic solution to the issue of kidnapped soldiers. Secondly, efforts should be made to resolve the present humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian areas. In the medium term, earnest efforts by Israel are essential to ensure that construction of the wall is stopped, since it not only aggravates human suffering in the Palestinian territories but also poses a mortal danger to the peace process. Moreover, Israel should make serious efforts to freeze and reverse all illegal settlement activity. Attempts to change demographics in some areas will only further complicate the final status negotiations and run counter to the goal of achieving peace. Israelis and Palestinian must deepen their dialogue and gradually move to address the final status issues. The Security Council should actively promote this process.

The implementation of the road map offers the most viable way forward towards sustainable peace. Ensuring a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and with the road map, is our collective obligation. The vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, was reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative and has been embraced by the entire international community. We must all work for the earliest possible realization of this vision.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Gahrah (Saudia Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the start I would like to associate myself with those who have congratulated you, Madam President, on your presidency of the Security Council this month. We would also like to thank you for your prompt response to the request to hold this meeting.

The delegation of Saudia Arabia would like to associate itself with Algeria and the statement it delivered on behalf of the Arab Group, and with Malaysia's, statement on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Once again, the Government of Israel reasserts its aggressive nature and continues its terrorist practices. Its aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is a form of terrorism that must be rejected. It is totally unjustified and is clear in its aims and objectives.

The Israeli claim that the Palestinians are solely responsible for the escalation of tension in the region because of Palestinian acts of resistance against the Israeli occupation and their taking of an Israeli soldier is unacceptable. The Palestinian resistance has suffered the loss of many victims, including members of families who were merely promenading on the beach of Gaza without having committed any act of aggression against Israel. Five people in one family were killed by Israeli artillery from land and from the sea. A small child cried out to the conscience of the international community, but that cry received no response. Not even an international investigation commission was

dispatched, nor was there an explicit condemnation of that shameful act.

Israel continues to besiege the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people. It continues to isolate them, to prevent them from gaining their livelihoods. It prevents the payment of Palestinian wages. Through extermination groups called "special units", it continues its assassination of activists and Palestinian leaders. The Palestinians are only exercising their legitimate right to resist.

The Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza is a flagrant violation of international law and of agreements that have been reached. The kidnapping of Palestinian personalities — ministers and representatives — is a terrible crime and a violation of international norms, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israeli terrorism in Gaza is not only the result of the capture of an Israeli soldier; it is part of the Israeli plan to destroy the Palestinian Government, which was legitimately, democratically and transparently elected, as witnessed by all.

The purpose of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians is to prevent them from reaching agreement among themselves, so that Israel can then claim that it has no partner for peace. The Israeli aggression lays bare the reality of the situation. Israel claims that its withdrawals are genuine; in fact, they are a deceptive attempt to keep the people who remain in the territories under siege. Israel is continuing to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure and the daily lives of the Palestinian people. It is starving the Palestinian people and depriving them of clean drinking water and the most basic living requirements so as to bring them to their knees and force them to accept the fait accompli created by a shameful and unjust occupation.

The Government of Israel would not have continued its acts of aggression if it were not for the negative stance of the international community and the failure of the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and ensure that its resolutions were implemented. The Israeli Government would not have disregarded resolutions of international legitimacy unless is knew that it could get away with its claim that it was acting in self-defence and that its acts of terrorism were legitimate and acceptable. The continuation of the tension and the violence in the occupied territories would not have continued if the road map had been implemented, the Arab initiative accepted and international resolutions implemented on the ground.

Saudi Arabia appeals to the international community, including the Security Council and the Quartet, to ensure that there is an immediate end to the Israeli aggression against Gaza and to compel Israel to withdraw its forces. They should ensure that all prisoners on both sides are released and that the provisions of international resolutions are implemented so as to ensure the establishment of a Palestinian State with Arab Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the land-for-peace initiative, and in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the road map and the Arab peace initiative.

The President: There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5482

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5482nd meeting

Thursday, 6 July 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

President	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Mr. Christensen
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Kitaoka
	Peru	Mr. Gallardo
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Johnston
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

Security Council mission

Report of the Security Council mission on the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/434)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-41819 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the retiring President

The President *(spoke in French)*: As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of July, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to our colleague Her Excellency Mr Ellen Margrethe Løj, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations, for her service as President of the Security Council for the month of June 2006. I am sure I speak for all members of the Security Council in expressing our deep appreciation to Ambassador Løj for the great diplomatic skill with which she conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Report of the Security Council mission on the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/434)

The President: I should like to inform the members of the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Belgium, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Finland, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Leterme (Belgium), Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Ms. Lehtonen (Finland) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President *(spoke in French)*: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/434, which contains the report of the Security Council mission on the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that took place from 6 to 12 June 2006.

I might now take the floor in my capacity as head of the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

First, I should like once again to express my thanks and the thanks of our colleagues who participated in the mission to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their welcome to the Security Council mission that visited Kinshasa from 6 to 12 June.

I have already reported in detail on our mission, so today I will address the essential points that I have communicated to the members of the Council, drawing also from the mission's report, which has since been published.

We came away from our meetings with the understanding that conditions have now been met to allow the holding of the elections that will mark the culmination of the transition period in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In organizational, technical and security terms, the legislative elections and the first round of presidential elections should be carried out in a satisfactory manner and in accordance with the announced timetable on 30 July.

Nevertheless, during our mission we informed our interlocutors of the concerns of the members of the Council about the deterioration of the political atmosphere, particularly as regards certain messages of division and exclusion being broadcast by the media. We stressed that such messages are dangerous and we recalled other situations in Africa in which such messages have had tragic consequences. The mission therefore made recommendations in that respect in its report, particularly in paragraph 51 regarding respect for the code of conduct, paragraph 52 regarding access to media, and paragraph 53 regarding the security of the electorate and candidates.

During our mission to Kinshasa, we emphasized the importance we attach to the campaign's being carried out as peacefully as possible. All should be able to speak freely and the press must be allowed to do its work. In that respect, it is regrettable that a correspondent of one international media company, Radio France Internationale, which is widely listened

to in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was not accredited and was expelled.

The elections will not be an end in themselves, as we stressed during our mission. We underlined the importance of the period to follow. We especially stressed the need for all political actors to adopt a non-exclusive approach. Much work will remain to be done following the elections. We note that the situation is far from stable and that militias continue to be active in the East.

In that respect, our report contains recommendations relating to two issues of special importance. Ongoing reform in the security sector is essential if we are to deal with the problem of armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I refer to paragraphs 54 to 56 of our report in that regard. Moreover, improved governance is essential if the Congolese nation and State are finally to benefit from the country's wealth after many years of war and transition. That issue is addressed in paragraphs 57 and 58 of our report.

Those are the main elements that I wish to stress in opening this debate.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for July. I wish to assure you that my delegation is fully prepared to work closely with yours during the course of our work.

I also wish to thank our colleague, Ambassador Løj, and her delegation for their excellent work in June.

I welcome the opportunity to thank you, Sir, in your capacity as the head of the mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for the excellent report that was issued following the visit and which you have just outlined for us. I simply wish to confirm that everything you have just said perfectly reflects the many discussions we held in Kinshasa on 11 and 12 June.

We sent two main messages to the political protagonists and civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I shall continue to use the full name "Democratic Republic of the Congo" in my statement because, if I were to use the terms "Congolese people" or "Congolese leadership", I would feel as if I were referring to my own country and nation. My brother from the Democratic Republic of the Congo will therefore understand why I shall use the full name of his country to make that distinction.

Our first message was one of thanks to all our interlocutors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We told them that it is high time that democratic, free, transparent and credible elections were organized there in an atmosphere of peace and rejecting hateful and divisive language. We, too, expressed our concerns with regard to the tone adopted by the media and made it clear that the Democratic Republic of the Congo must find a way to ease tensions before proceeding to elections. With the launching of the campaign on 29 June, we note that calm is prevailing for the moment, and hope that it will continue to do so up to the elections and beyond.

The second message was that the international community has been and continues to be ready to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo during this process without any interference, as we believe that the future leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should emerge exclusively from the ballot box.

We also explained that, while the elections certainly represent a crucial step, a great deal remains to be done. The elections are unlikely to resolve all the problems. There is still a long road to travel before peace and stability are fully restored and the foundations have been laid for sustainable development. We must therefore bear in mind the need to preserve the potential for ongoing cooperation with the international community, which must remain engaged, and with the United Nations in particular, which must on this occasion ensure the successful fruition of its partnership with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Congolese sensibility leads me to stress that point.

Six days ago, the Democratic Republic of the Congo celebrated the forty-sixth anniversary of its independence. It was precisely at the time that independence was declared that the difficulties arose. The crisis in that country has thus lasted 46 years. We are all aware that the first United Nations intervention was not successful. Now, however, I feel that the moment has come for everyone — the international

community, and the United Nations in particular, as well as the political actors, leaders and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — to ensure a successful outcome this time around and to begin the process of rehabilitation.

The Security Council mission undertaken a few weeks ago to the Democratic Republic of the Congo was therefore very welcome to us. It was the ideal opportunity, on the eve of an important event, to clarify the rules of the game and to agree on the steps that must be taken in the future to ensure an end to the lengthy transitional process.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): Mr. President, I join in expressing the sentiments already voiced regarding your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Denmark. We also join in expressing our gratitude to you for having led the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for your remarks this morning.

The mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo was vital and timely. Not only was it a clear demonstration of the commitment of the Security Council to support and assist the country as it marches towards the first democratic elections in four decades, but it also provided an opportunity to learn first-hand the status of the preparations for the historic elections that are to take place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ambassador Ikouebe complemented an important aspect of what we wanted to say. Therefore, we will not cover those items; we will only highlight a number of issues.

First, we urge that the elections be held as planned and that all the registered voters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo go to the polls to exercise their democratic right to choose their leaders. We appeal to the people and to the leaders of the various political parties to accept the outcome of the elections and — once it is established that they were free and fair — to support that political process and its outcomes.

Secondly, it is our view that, having invested so heavily in the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including by sending seven missions, the Security Council needs to remain engaged in the country during its post-election period to ensure that the political gains to be achieved are consolidated.

Thirdly, it is also our view that the Democratic Republic of the Congo should continue to benefit from the presence of the United Nations and its agencies in maintaining peace, security and stability by instituting reforms in all sectors that need them. Suffice it to say here that the challenges are enormous but not impossible to overcome.

Fourthly, within the region it is crucial to enhance our efforts to support the people and the elected Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as they adjust in the post-election and post-conflict phase so that they can find their rightful role as an important and strategic player in the region. To that end, we look forward to the holding of a second conference on the Great Lakes region at an early date to chart the way forward to regional integration and cooperation. In that regard, Tanzania reiterates its commitment to maintain and strengthen its policy of good-neighbourliness with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Lastly, we believe that the gains that the Democratic Republic of the Congo stands to secure can be sustained only if there is a concerted effort to alleviate the abject poverty of its people. We have heard too often that a rich endowment of natural resources can sometimes be a curse; the reverse is also possible and is achievable. With sufficient political will — especially on the part of the political leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — and with the assistance of the United Nations, the rest of the international community and the international financial institutions, the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be transformed into an economic giant of the region and, indeed, of Africa.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo now stands at a point where it must rise to meet the aspirations of all its people to peace, security and development.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Permit me at the outset to carry out a pleasant duty — that of saying what a pleasure it is to see you, Sir, presiding over the Security Council during

the month of July. I should also like to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Denmark, and to congratulate her on a successful mandate as Council President last month.

I am grateful to you, Mr. President, for having kindly agreed to organize this public meeting to consider the report of the Security Council mission on the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/434). I also wish to sincerely thank the members of the Council mission, whom you led on their recent visit of 10 to 12 June.

Indeed, this year, particular emphasis has been placed on the implementation of the transition process begun by the 17 December 2002 Comprehensive and Inclusive Peace Agreement. The members of the Council mission were able to evaluate the status of that process, which is entering its final phase. They were eye witnesses to the deep desire of the Congolese people to go to the polls to freely and democratically choose, for the first time in four decades, men and women to preside over their destiny during the next legislative session. From their discussions with their many interlocutors, the members of the Council mission undoubtedly understood that an unequivocal consensus was emerging in favour of continuing and concluding the peace process as soon as possible.

This last phase is a decisive step in the peace process. The campaign for the general elections slated for 30 July has been officially under way for several days throughout the national territory.

Here, I should like to congratulate the Council members on the drafting of their excellent report, which I am sure will enable us to better chart the path still ahead of us and will lead us together towards the peace and development to which millions of Congolese women and men aspire. The members of the Council mission formulated a series of relevant recommendations; I agree with all of them. I hope that the Security Council, which will undoubtedly discuss the report, can follow it up in concrete terms.

In that connection, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, has reaffirmed his commitment to do everything possible to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections, which are a new rendezvous with history that my country cannot miss. For the President, these elections are crucial and sensitive. They are the right path towards normalization and the resolution of the eternal problem of governmental legitimacy in my country. The President believes that nothing else must delay the holding of the elections. He has always tirelessly urged the people to turn out to vote in massive numbers and has asked the political actors to accept the verdict of the ballot box out of respect for the Congolese people.

The President has also instructed me to express to the Security Council his appreciation for resolution 1693 (2006). Adopted on 30 June — the anniversary of the independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the resolution sends a strong message to the Republic with a view to the smooth conduct and success of the electoral process.

I would like to share with the Council some concerns expressed by the Congolese people regarding the holding of the elections.

First, with respect to the organization of the elections, we would like here highly to commend the tremendous amount of work done by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Nonetheless, every effort must be made to ensure that no new political or technical constraints are allowed to prevent the IEC from holding the elections in accordance with the calendar.

Secondly, while reaffirming the importance of fair access to the media, let me also stress the importance of doing everything possible to ensure that messages of hate and exclusion are expunged from the electoral campaign. Indeed, sadly, certain radio broadcasts bear a striking similarity to those aired by Radio-Télévision libre des Milles Collines. We welcome the fact that the IEC and the High Media Authority are currently carrying out a publicity and awareness-raising campaign on the electoral process. We remain convinced that the campaign will fully meet expectations. Let me add that measures have been taken to enable the international media to cover the elections.

Thirdly, with respect to new rounds of negotiations and consultations, let me stress that the referendum, the Constitution, the electoral law and the upcoming elections all emanate from a comprehensive and inclusive agreement that itself was the outcome of several political dialogues and consultation processes. The Congolese people have clearly expressed their wish that an end be put to a seemingly interminable transition period through the establishment of new institutions and leaders of their choice. We must ensure

respect for that clearly expressed desire of the Congolese people and not jeopardize the gains made to date during the transition by engaging in fruitless political dialogue.

We in the Democratic Republic of the Congo believe in the value of dialogue. Along with negotiations and consultations, it is the very essence of democracy. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been engaged in an ongoing internal dialogue since well before the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, signed on 10 July 1999, which marked the beginning of active involvement on the part of the United Nations. That will certainly continue to be the case before, during and after the elections.

Fourthly, the security situation in the country in general and in the eastern part of the national territory remains a source of concern. We welcome the fact that the Security Council and the European Union have agreed - and I thank them for this - substantially to increase their presence in my country. That will help to set up mechanisms aimed at ensuring secure conditions for the people and for the elections. We must also ensure strict respect for the law and for public order, without prejudice to efforts to promote national reconciliation, restore the authority of the State and rebuild the country. Those efforts must continue during the electoral process.

Let me assure the Council that the Democratic Republic of the Congo will do everything in its power to ensure that the elections take place in a calm atmosphere. The support of the international community will be crucial and decisive. In that respect, the support of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), of the European Union and of bilateral partners is greatly appreciated. It is important that together we use all means at our disposal to ensure the success of the elections.

Not only must the elections take place successfully; we must meet, in a responsible manner, the expectations of the people following the elections. It should be clearly indicated — and the Council mission stressed this point — that the elections are not an end in themselves. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is requesting additional assistance in the area of the restructuring and reform of the army and the police as well with the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

The support of the international community will also be necessary in terms of the promotion of policies aimed at national reconciliation as well as economic recovery and the reconstruction of the country. The international community, and the United Nations in particular, are invited to consider continuing their cooperation over the long term, because the peace and security that the Congolese people desire so wholeheartedly are prerequisites for the sustainable development of not only my country but also of the entire Great Lakes region.

Those are elements of a broader programme to be developed by the first Congolese Government of the Third Republic. That programme must include judicial assistance so as to put an end to rampant impunity and prosecute all those suspected of having committed violations of human rights or of international humanitarian law, particularly with respect to vulnerable segments of the population, especially women and children.

Before concluding, allow me to express to the Secretary-General and to his Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo our gratitude for their tireless efforts to restore peace to my country. I would also like to thank the Security Council for its periodic dispatch of missions to my country. Indeed, we are pleased to note that each visit by a Security Council mission has led to tangible progress in the peace process.

Lastly, I cannot but mention the staff of MONUC, the United Nations system and the international and national staff, who are paying a heavy price — and sometimes making the ultimate sacrifice — to restore peace and dignity to my country.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Finland, to whom I give the floor.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country Norway, member of the European Economic

Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

Mr. President, let me first thank you for having led the recent Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for your briefing on the results of the mission. We share the assessment of the situation that you presented to the Council on 16 June.

We are indeed at a critical juncture in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The holding of the first free elections in 45 years represents a milestone marking the end of the transition period. These elections must fulfil the earnest desire of the Congolese people to select their representatives, at different levels of the democratic institutions, in free, fair and transparent elections.

We fully support the electoral calendar set by the Independent Electoral Commission for the presidential and legislative elections. We urge all political forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to engage in the electoral campaign in a spirit of peace and reconciliation and to hold a responsible debate. We believe that, in order to create a favourable climate for the elections, all possible measures must be taken to ensure respect for freedom of expression, including through fair access to the media. At the same time, it is crucial that the media display a responsible attitude. The EU condemns all appeals to hatred and xenophobia. The negative messages of the pre-election campaign on the subject of *congolité* must not be repeated.

Successful elections require sufficient security. While it is first and foremost the responsibility of the large Congolese police force and the new integrated units of the army, supported by the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), to provide security, the EU, upon a request by the United Nations and supported by the Congolese authorities, has decided to deploy an EU military operation in support of MONUC. The Security Council authorized that operation by resolution 1671 (2006) of 25 April, and the EU Council of Ministers officially took the decision to launch the operation on 12 June. In addition, the police assistance mission in Kinshasa (EUPOL KINSHASA) is being reinforced during the election period to help the Congolese police forces coordinate their activities. We will thus be in a position to make a significant contribution to creating a more secure environment for the elections. However, it remains the responsibility of the Congolese authorities to ensure the protection of all the candidates, preventing attempts at harassment or at restricting their mobility throughout the Republic.

Successful elections also require sufficient resources. The European Union and its member States have to date provided some €250 million — approximately $320 million — or nearly 80 per cent of the overall cost of the elections. We have full trust in MONUC's ability to support the Congolese authorities effectively in the organization of the elections. Furthermore, in order to verify the correct conduct of the elections and to create trust in the results of the elections, the European Union is deploying a large election observation mission. The mission will liaise closely with other international observer missions, in particular those from the African Union and the Southern African Development Community.

However, successful elections mark only the beginning of the long and arduous process of recovery in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nobody should be fooled into believing that the inauguration of a new President and the swearing-in of the members of parliament will be the end of this process. Equally, continued strong support by the international community will be necessary long after the elections.

In our view, the following elements are crucial for the long-term success of our common efforts to stabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo. First, it is important that the election results be accepted by all political players. Conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are such that all those who wish to do so will be able to participate. The European Union therefore calls on all the political parties, even those which have chosen not to take part in the elections, to undertake to respect the verdict of the polls. The real test of the success of the democratic process will be the way in which the election results are handled and the way in which the majority deals with the minority. Everyone should look to the future in a spirit of tolerance and reconciliation, a future in which all political forces must participate in the reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Secondly, security has to be effective in the whole territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Important progress has been achieved in the

field of security-sector reform, with the process of army integration under way. Since June 2005, the European Union has supported defence reform through its mission of assistance for security-sector reform which provides advice and assistance to the Congolese authorities. A key project in this framework addresses the chain of payments, aiming at ensuring that monthly pay reaches the soldiers. Furthermore, the European Union has helped in achieving important results in the formation of the Integrated Police Unit in Kinshasa, through, inter alia, its civilian police mission, EUPOL KINSHASA.

However, much still needs to be done, and therefore the European Union is currently drafting a strategy in order to support security-sector reform in the post-election period. The EU urges the Congolese authorities to pursue further army integration as a matter of urgency and to remedy the problems related to command, discipline and, in particular, impunity, as well as those concerning financial management and social support.

The related problem of illegal armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo needs to remain at the centre of attention after the elections. We welcome the increased attention the Security Council has recently paid to the regional dimensions of this problem. The EU stresses the crucial role neighbouring countries can play and underlines the need for strict enforcement of the arms embargo. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2006/310) on a strategy to deal with the problems of armed groups operating in the region. We encourage the Secretariat to continue its work in this field, including on the specific problem of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

We welcome the firm action taken by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to combat impunity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and hope also that there will soon be progress in apprehending the leaders of the LRA. We also commend MONUC's role in the disarmament of illegal armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUC has paid a heavy tribute in human lives. We expect that MONUC will continue to play its fundamental role for security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the elections, long enough to ensure a proper security environment in the eastern provinces.

Thirdly, economic development is key to the long-term success of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The country is rich in natural resources which, if illegal exploitation is halted and if these resources are managed transparently, should provide ample income to bring about a degree of prosperity for the people.

Since the Pretoria and Sun City Agreements, the international community has been an indispensable partner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is important that the international community remain committed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo beyond the election period and that it be given the opportunity to do so. The European Union and its member States are among the main development partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since 2002, programmes under the Cotonou Agreement have been funded with some €750 million. For the next indicative programme, from 2008 to 2013, the European Commission will aim to build on the election process with, inter alia, support for poverty reduction, governance, judicial reform and security-sector reform. In this regard, the European Union expects the new President and Government to govern in the interests of all Congolese and to stand ready to engage with the international community in a fair and transparent dialogue on governance.

The year 2006 might well be the most significant year for the Democratic Republic of the Congo since independence. The successful holding of the elections will be the first, decisive step in the construction of a new, brighter future for the people. That in turn successful elections will also greatly contribute to peace and development in the whole region of the Great Lakes. Together, we have a responsibility to help the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo achieve this goal and to stand by them in support of the authorities emerging from the elections for a long time after the actual election period. The EU stands ready to remain a part of any future engagement by the international community in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Cools (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I would also like to thank your

predecessor, Ambassador Løj of Denmark. Finally, let me indicate that Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement just made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the presidency of the European Union.

Last Friday, the Democratic Republic of the Congo marked the forty-sixth anniversary of its independence and launched its electoral campaign. This campaign will culminate in elections, with the first round of the presidential elections and the legislative elections to be held on 30 July. Therefore, today's Council debate, following the recent mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is particularly timely.

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having provided my delegation with this opportunity to share some thoughts on recent developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on what we feel may help guide the Council's future action.

First of all, I would like, on behalf of the Belgian Government, to express our appreciation for the work carried out by the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in recent years through the Security Council, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and the humanitarian and development agencies. Belgium has provided unstinting support for United Nations efforts to meet the real challenges of restoring peace and stability and achieving reunification and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Belgian support in the form of logistics, equipment and training for the deployment of a Beninese battalion in Katanga is the most recent example of such assistance.

The electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo represents a major challenge, and we must ensure that it proceeds smoothly. We must demand that the leaders and the candidates adhere to a code of conduct setting the standards aimed at ensuring correct and respectful behaviour by all parties towards other candidates and the electorate.

The bold messages that you, Mr. President, conveyed during your visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo were very important in that respect. We must reject restrictions on the freedom of the press, promote equal access to the media, prohibit the intimidation of candidates and condemn hateful and xenophobic speech.

We welcome the establishment of a committee of eminent personalities. We are certain that that initiative and others will reduce tension and prevent the setbacks that might result from inappropriate actions.

Our message must be simple: those individuals who can demonstrate, in free and transparent elections, that they enjoy the full support of the Congolese people may legitimately take up their new responsibilities in a democracy-based Democratic Republic of the Congo. Let us not forget the essential role to be played in that democratic regime by the future parliament, where the representatives of the people will sit, and which will give full expression to the notion of inclusivity for which the Council appealed during its recent visit.

We cannot avoid the key issue of our future involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the elections. The most recent report of the Secretary-General on MONUC (S/2006/390) contains a number of valuable preliminary comments in that respect. Belgium believes that the issue of maintaining troops within the framework of MONUC must be carefully and fully examined. In our opinion, the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be able to draw on MONUC support for as long as is necessary to help it to restore State authority for the long term over all of its national territory, in particular in the east of the country. That is in the interests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Great Lakes region and Africa as a whole.

The report of the Secretary-General rightly points out that the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains worrying and that significant efforts are required in that respect. It also highlights the need to begin reflection on peacebuilding mechanisms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We welcome those proposals. Belgium will do everything in its power to contribute to the debate on such proposals, as well as to their implementation, in full cooperation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its partners.

The messages that the Council conveyed at Kinshasa, in particular with regard to the need to improve governance and turn the page on a tumultuous past in that respect, demonstrate its political resolve to make progress. Belgium remains convinced that structural mechanisms geared towards improving the management of natural resources can provide a meaningful and lasting contribution in that respect.

The Secretary-General — and you, Mr. President, in your report — mentioned the efforts that must be made with regard to the reform of the security sector in general and the army in particular. Together with a number of other partners, in particular South Africa and Angola, as well as the European Union, Belgium is fully engaged in that sector. We have participated, in particular, in training and equipping nine integrated brigades of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, in spite of those efforts, there is a long road ahead. It is our duty to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to establish a professional republican army, which it needs if it is to reassert its authority throughout its territory — an army at the service of its people. Let us not waste time drawing up plans that, for the most part, already exist. Let us undertake solid efforts. Let us invest in effective and sustainable reform of the army, the police and the justice sector. That is the essence of peacebuilding.

The President (*spoke in French*): In my capacity as head of the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would like once again to thank the Congolese authorities for the warm welcome that they gave us. I would also like to thank the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bill Swing for the excellent work the United Nations is doing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I would like to conclude by repeating the words of Ambassador Ileka of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who said that his country has a new rendezvous with history. The international community, in particular the Council, is mobilized and ready to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to succeed.

I believe that I am expressing the view of all of the members of the Council in saying that we are determined to remain partners with the Congolese people after the elections in order to help them with the process of the recovery of the country.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.5483

Security Council

Distr.: General
11 July 2006

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 5483rd (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 11 July 2006, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"At its 5483rd meeting, held in private on 11 July 2006, the Security Council considered the item entitled 'The situation in Georgia'.

"The President, with the consent of the Council, invited the representatives of Georgia and Germany to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Her Excellency Mrs. Nino Burjanadze, made a statement.

"The representative of the Russian Federation made a statement."

06-42472 (E) 110706

United Nations S/PV.5484

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5484th meeting

Wednesday, 12 July 2006, 1.10 p.m.

New York

President	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Mr. Christensen
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Haneda
	Peru	Mr. Ruiz Rosas
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Qahtani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Ms. Wolcott Sanders

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-42613 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 1.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of India, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Malhotra (India) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

After consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council condemns in the strongest terms the series of bomb attacks that occurred in different parts of India, including Mumbai, on 11 July 2006, causing numerous deaths and injuries, and expresses its deepest sympathy and condolences to the victims of these heinous acts of terrorism and their families, and to the people and the Government of India.

"The Security Council underlines the need to bring the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice, and urges all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005), to cooperate actively with the Indian authorities in this regard.

"The Security Council reaffirms that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.

"The Security Council further reaffirms the need to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts. The Council reminds States that they must ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

"The Security Council reiterates its determination to combat all forms of terrorism, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2006/30.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5485

Security Council

Distr.: General
13 July 2006

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 5485th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 13 July 2006, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"At its 5485th meeting, held in private on 13 July 2006, the Security Council considered the item entitled 'Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)'.

"The President, with the consent of the Council, invited the representatives of Albania, Germany, Finland, Italy, Montenegro and Serbia to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"His Excellency Mr. Vojislav Koštunica, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, made a statement.

"Members of the Council also made statements.

"His Excellency Mr. Koštunica made a further statement."

06-42800 (E) 130706

United Nations S/PV.5486

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5486th meeting

Thursday, 13 July 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Pereyra Plasencia
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Qahtani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-42832 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Somalia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mohamed (Somalia) took a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

After consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council reaffirms all its previous statements and resolutions concerning the situation in Somalia, in particular the statement by its President of 15 March 2006 (S/PRST/2006/11).

"The Security Council reiterates its commitment to a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the situation in Somalia and its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia, consistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

"The Security Council reiterates its strong support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. François Fall. The Security Council encourages Ambassador Fall and other United Nations agencies and officers to actively engage in the region to promote peace and stability. It calls upon all Member States to provide him their full support in this regard.

"The Security Council supports the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) as the internationally recognized authorities to restore peace, stability and governance to Somalia. It notes the importance for stability in Somalia of broad-based and representative institutions and of an inclusive political process, as envisaged in the Transitional Federal Charter (TFC).

"The Security Council welcomes the agreement reached in Khartoum on 22 June between the TFG and the Islamic Courts, sent to the presidency of the Security Council on 29 June 2006 (S/2006/443). The Security Council commends the League of Arab States (LAS) for facilitating the talks. The Security Council condemns the recent fighting in Mogadishu and requests all parties to adhere to the ceasefire agreed on 22 June. In this regard, the Security Council emphasizes the importance of dialogue between the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) and the Islamic Courts.

"The Security Council therefore urges all parties involved in this dialogue to engage constructively at the next round of talks, scheduled for 15 July, where it looks forward to further progress in pursuit of a lasting political process.

"The Security Council requests all parties inside and outside of Somalia to refrain from action that could provoke or perpetuate violence and violations of human rights, endanger the ceasefire and political process, or further damage the humanitarian situation.

"The Security Council expresses its grave concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Somalia, and demands that all Somali leaders ensure complete and unhindered humanitarian access, as well as providing guarantees for the safety and security of the humanitarian aid workers in Somalia.

"The Security Council commends the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for their continuing efforts to promote peace and stability

to Somalia and the region. The Council notes their meetings of 19 June and 28-29 June 2006, and welcomes the role of the AU/IGAD/LAS and European Union fact-finding mission to Somalia on 5-7 July 2006 in promoting peace, stability and a political process.

"The Security Council welcomes the meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the AU in Banjul on 5 July 2006, and notes that meeting's request for the Security Council to consider an exemption to the arms embargo imposed on Somalia by resolution 733 (1992) of 23 January 1992, to pave way for a possible deployment of a Peace Support Mission (PSM) and to help facilitate the re-establishment of the national security forces of Somalia.

"The Security Council states its willingness, if it judges that a PSM would contribute to peace and stability in Somalia, to consider the above request for a PSM, on the basis of a detailed mission plan from IGAD or the AU.

"The Security Council welcomes the fact that the TFIs and the TFP were able to agree on 14 June 2006 to adopt the National Security and Stabilization Plan for Somalia. The Security Council believes that the adoption of a security plan is an important step towards providing a framework for effective security sector reform in Somalia, in order to help deliver peace for all Somalis.

"The Security Council expresses its readiness to consider a limited modification of the arms embargo to enable the TFIs, on the basis of a sustainable peace process, to develop Somalia's security sector and national institutions capable of responding to security issues.

"The Security Council emphasizes, however, the continued contribution made to Somalia's peace and security by the arms embargo, and calls on all to comply with it. The Security Council reiterates its intention to consider urgently how to strengthen the effectiveness of the arms embargo.

"The Security Council welcomes the outcome of the first meeting of the International Contact Group on Somalia."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2006/31.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 3.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5487

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5487th meeting

Thursday, 13 July 2006, 3.15 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhengmin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Loj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Pereyra Plasencia
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Qahtani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynar
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2006/376)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-42844 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2006/376)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Liberia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Ersson (Liberia) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/376, which contains the eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/2006/509, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, China, Congo, Denmark, France, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Peru, Qatar, Russian Federation, Slovakia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America

The President (*spoke in French*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1694 (2006).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council will remain seized of the matter.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5488

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5488th meeting

Thursday, 13 July 2006, 3.25 p.m.

New York

President	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhengmin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Pereyra Plasencia
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Qahtani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/458)

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/462)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-42893 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/458)

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/462)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Israel in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 13 July 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/520 and which reads as follows:

"I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Thursday, 13 July 2006, regarding the 'situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.'"

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now continue its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in response to the requests contained in letters dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representatives of Algeria and Qatar addressed to the President of the Security Council, documents S/2006/458 and S/2006/462, respectively.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/2006/508, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Qatar.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, China, Congo, France, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Qatar, Russian Federation, United Republic of Tanzania

Against:

United States of America

Abstaining:

Denmark, Peru, Slovakia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The President (*spoke in French*): The result of the voting is as follows: 10 in favour, one against and four abstaining. The draft resolution has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to those representatives who wish to make statements following the vote.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): We are all aware of the delicate situation in the Middle East, where new and major developments are unfolding as we speak.

In the light of the fluid and volatile nature of events on the ground, the United States believes that this draft resolution was not only untimely but already outmoded. We have just recently witnessed a major escalation by Hizbollah. On top of that, we have the announcement that the Secretary-General will be sending a team to the region to help resolve the situation. These important new developments should be reflected in any text we consider.

Notwithstanding these new developments, there were many other reasons to reject this draft. The draft resolution before the Council was unbalanced. It placed demands on one side in the Middle East conflict but not the other. This draft resolution would have exacerbated tensions in the region and would have undermined our vision of two democratic States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

Adoption of the draft would also have undermined the credibility of the Security Council, which itself must be seen by both sides as an honest broker in the Middle East conflict. In that regard, public statements of United Nations officials must also accurately reflect positions agreed by Member Governments.

The United States worked hard with other delegations to achieve a more balanced text, one which acknowledged that Israeli military actions were in direct response to repeated rocket attacks into southern Israel from Gaza and the 25 June abduction of Israeli Defence Forces Corporal Gilad Shalit by Hamas. Regrettably, we were not able to reach agreement.

While we remain gravely concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, we remain steadfast in our conviction that the best way to resolve the immediate crisis is for Hamas to secure the safe and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit.

Establishing the foundations for a lasting peace, however, will require us to focus our attention not just on Hamas but on the State sponsors of terror that back them, particularly Syria and Iran. Let us be clear: without the financial and material support of Damascus and Tehran, Hamas would be severely crippled in carrying out its terrorist operations.

We call on Syria and Iran to end their role as State sponsors of terror and unequivocally condemn the actions of Hamas, including this kidnapping. We yet again call upon Syria to arrest the Hamas ringleader, Khalid Mishal, who currently resides in Damascus. We stress again our condemnation of Syrian and Iranian support of Hizbollah, which has claimed responsibility for the other kidnappings along the Blue Line, between Israel and Lebanon.

We further call on the Palestinian Authority Government to stop all acts of violence and terror and comply with the principles enunciated by the Quartet: renounce terror, recognize Israel, and accept previous obligations and agreements, including the road map. The failure of the Palestinian Authority Government to take these steps hurts the Palestinian people.

We are obviously concerned about the duration of the present difficulties and the lack of a solution, but the issue for us is whether action by the Council makes such a solution more or less likely, not simply whether or not the Council seems to be "engaged".

The United States remains firmly committed to working with others to establish the foundations for a lasting peace in the region, a foundation that would have been undermined had this draft resolution passed.

Mr. Pereyra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru abstained in the voting because it believes that the draft resolution does not adequately reflect what is happening in the Middle East.

First, the draft resolution does not take account of the fact that elements of Hizbollah, considered a terrorist organization, have kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and have launched rockets, causing civilian casualties and provoking a response by the Israeli Defence Forces.

Secondly, the draft resolution does not take account of the Quartet's requirements that the Palestinian Authority Hamas-led Government recognize Israel, renounce violence and respect the agreements previously entered into by the Palestinian Authority. Non-compliance with those requirements is at the root of the crisis and is preventing the parties from resuming diplomatic negotiations leading to the peaceful coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, in accordance with the provisions of the road map.

Peru deplores the escalation of violence and the loss of innocent human lives. It calls for the release of the kidnapped soldiers, including the two soldiers

taken hostage in Lebanon, as well as of the elected Palestinian officials who were recently illegally detained.

Peru recognizes Israel's right to defend itself. However, Israel must do so in accordance with international humanitarian law, avoiding causing harm to civilians and damage to the infrastructure of Lebanon and Gaza. We urge Israel to avoid the excessive use of force and deplore the harm caused to Palestinian and Lebanese civil society.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Regrettably, Denmark was not in a position to vote in favour of the draft resolution just considered. The draft resolution addresses issues of great concern to my Government, and, if it had included a more thorough recognition of the complexities on the ground, my delegation would have liked to vote in favour of the draft resolution.

Denmark is very concerned about the situation in the Middle East, which has further deteriorated over the past few days. In particular, Denmark is seriously concerned at the loss of civilian life caused by the escalating military operation and its consequences, including the deterioration of the humanitarian condition of the population in Gaza. We therefore call on both parties to alleviate the desperate humanitarian situation of the civilian population.

Moreover, my Government continues to urge both parties to abstain from any action that violates international law and on Israel to exercise utmost restraint and to avoid disproportionate action. Denmark continues to be concerned about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature and calls for their immediate release. Those detained should be accorded their full legal rights in accordance with international law.

Denmark continues to call on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets into Israeli territory.

The abducted Israeli soldier should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Recent developments, including in relations between Israel and Lebanon — which we will be discussing tomorrow — underline more than ever that political negotiations are the only way to achieve a just and lasting settlement. Both parties must urgently demonstrate an active commitment to the search for a negotiated two-State solution and respect existing agreements and obligations.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): Unfortunately, my delegation was not in a position to support the draft resolution on the situation in the Middle East as it was put before the Security Council today.

Slovakia is very concerned about the events that have been taking place recently in the Gaza Strip. We are especially concerned about the deaths of civilians, both Palestinians and Israelis, and about the destruction of basic power-supply infrastructure in the Palestinian territories. We therefore take this opportunity to once again appeal to both sides for the release of all detained and abducted persons. Both parties should refrain from any action that could cause further deterioration or escalation of the situation.

We believe that all the decisions of the Security Council regarding the region of the Middle East are very important and that they have a direct impact on the situation and on future developments. In that sense, any action taken by the Council should be considered very carefully, with the aim of making a balanced appeal to all parties and with the final goal of achieving a just and lasting peace.

We are very sorry to again note with concern — as we did in the Council just on 21 June — that the Palestinian Government, which was formed and is being led by Hamas, has still not committed itself to the three principles laid out by the Quartet in its statement of 30 January. We remain convinced about that and reiterate the need to meet and implement those three principles: non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations.

As that crucial element and several other very important issues — in particular the condemnation of terrorist acts — were not, in our view, sufficiently reflected in the draft resolution, we were not in a position to support it. We would also have welcomed a reference to the most recent developments between Lebanon and Israel.

As we have done previously, we once again call on both parties to exercise the utmost restraint. We urge them to commit themselves fully to the goal of a negotiated two-State solution in accordance with the provisions of the road map.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the crisis in Gaza, which is undermining prospects for peace in the Middle East and causing a severe deterioration in the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population. We are contributing nationally to efforts to resolve the crisis through contacts in the region and with our key partners. We are urging all parties to do all they can to address this crisis and to prevent the situation from worsening. Only through negotiation can a viable solution be achieved.

We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit. We call on the Palestinian Authority to bring an end to the violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets into Israeli territory.

We are very concerned about the suffering of the Palestinian population. While Israel has every right to act in self-defence, it should do so in a way that does not escalate the situation, that is proportionate and measured and that conforms to international law and avoids civilian deaths and suffering.

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett made a statement today expressing her concern about the situation in Lebanon.

It is important that any statement from the Council should support the efforts of those most closely involved in trying to resolve the conflict. Any text must therefore be balanced and carefully reflect all relevant aspects of the situation. While we appreciate the efforts of the sponsors to reflect some of our concerns, we still do not believe that the text before us was sufficiently balanced or that it recognized the complexity of the situation. We therefore regret that further time was not allowed to try to resolve the outstanding differences and to reach a text on which we could all agree. We therefore abstained in the vote.

Mr. Al-Qahtani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): As is well known to everyone, Qatar, in the light of its responsibilities regarding towards the question of Palestine, submitted a balanced draft resolution that reflected the views of the majority of the Council. We took into consideration the views and comments of all Council members. However, the Council was nonetheless unable to adopt that balanced draft resolution due to reasons that have become clear to us. Peace-loving countries will be able to judge the objectivity of those reasons.

We have on numerous occasions failed to rise to our responsibility to protect the Palestinian people, who cry out for our support. When our response is weak, it seems as if we are shirking our responsibilities to protect civilian lives, notably those of helpless women and children. The images of unarmed innocent people being mercilessly killed and slaughtered will forever be in our minds and in the minds of all peace-loving peoples.

We should put an end to flagrant violations of international humanitarian law. The failure of the Security Council today to assume its responsibilities as regards the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and to put an end to aggression will only encourage the aggressor and lengthen the duration of the cycle of violence. The fact that the Council is not taking action on such a deteriorating situation will not only serve to exacerbate the situation, it will also cast doubt on the ability of the Council to implement international law.

Peace-loving peoples who are victims of war continue to hope that the Security Council will assume its full responsibilities and carry out its fundamental mandate of maintaining international peace and security. The day will come when the Council will adopt decisive resolutions against the aggression and violence to which the Palestinian people are being subjected.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for your adept leadership and guidance of the Council during this critical period, as well as throughout the many consultations prior to the vote on the draft resolution today. At the same time, I wish to express our deep appreciation to the delegation of Qatar for all its efforts, as a member of both the Council and the Arab Group, in steering our long and often difficult negotiations on the draft resolution.

We express our thanks in that regard as well to Saudi Arabia, in its capacity as Chair of the Arab Group for the month of July, and convey our appreciation to all those who have supported our just efforts throughout this process, aimed at having the

Security Council, in accordance with its authority and responsibilities, take action to address the crisis situation that continues to prevail in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

We believe that all possible efforts were exerted to arrive at a balanced and reasonable draft resolution addressing the major issues facing us at this time. We thank the members of the Council that voted in favour of the draft resolution, upholding their responsibilities as members of the Council and, at the same time, upholding international law, including international humanitarian law, which is being grossly violated and gravely breached by Israel, the occupying Power, as it carries out its relentless military assaults against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population under its occupation, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

The downward spiral of developments and the dramatic deterioration of the situation on the ground in recent weeks, including the decline of the already dire humanitarian situation as a result of Israel's lethal military aggression and continuing escalation of violence against the Palestinian people and their leadership, gave urgency to this matter and to our efforts to have the Council be seriously engaged in guiding this crisis towards its resolution.

We are highly disappointed and frustrated at the Council's continued inability to act while innocent Palestinian civilians continue to be brutally killed by the Israeli occupying forces. The failure to adopt today's draft resolution will not help to calm the situation or contribute to resolving the current crisis, and it seriously harms the credibility of the Council at this crucial time, sending the wrong message to the occupying Power and further fuelling the disastrous culture of impunity that has allowed Israel to continue breaching international law for all these years, and through to today, without being held accountable for its actions.

Indeed, even as we meet in this Chamber, Israel, the occupying Power, continues deliberately and wantonly to cause more human carnage and physical destruction, turning the besieged and impoverished Gaza Strip into a devastated humanitarian wasteland of death, rubble and misery. The Israeli occupying forces continue wantonly to destroy Palestinian homes and property, agricultural land, vital infrastructure and institutions, including, just today, the bombing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Gaza City.

Far worse, innocent Palestinian civilians continue to be brutally killed daily by the Israeli occupying forces in a barrage of air strikes and artillery bombardment launched against the defenceless civilian population. Yesterday alone, at least 23 Palestinians were killed by the occupying forces, among them nine members of the Salmiya family — a mother, a father and their seven children — cold-bloodedly murdered in their own home when the Israeli occupying forces deliberately dropped a quarter-ton bomb on their home. That is State terrorism against a captive civilian population, and all of those acts clearly constitute war crimes. All such acts must be condemned. Action must be taken to compel the occupying Power to cease such grave breaches and to abide by its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the perpetrators of those crimes must be held accountable and brought to justice.

There is no doubt that the situation is seriously worsening with each passing day, compounding the suffering and hardship being endured by the Palestinian civilian population, and that tensions and fractions continue dramatically to rise, resulting in the further destabilization of the situation not only in the area, but beyond in the region. The overall situation that is now prevailing clearly requires the immediate attention of and concerted action by the international community before it deteriorates even further and plunges the entire region into an uncontrollable cycle of violence and conflict. This is a matter of international peace and security, and it calls for serious measures by the international community, including foremost this Council.

We continue to believe that the Council should uphold its duties in the maintenance of peace and security and in the protection of civilians in armed conflict with regard to the situation of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and we believe that, in the face of this ongoing tragedy, it ultimately will. It is that conviction, based on the principles enshrined in the Charter and on our belief in the rule of international law, which has brought us back to the Security Council time and time again, and not any other reason, despite the claims made by some in that regard. What other recourse does a people have when it has been oppressed, subjugated, weakened and denied its most basic human rights under a belligerent foreign military occupation for more than 38 years?

The question of Palestine cannot, among the many conflicts, crises and tragedies being faced by the international community, be excluded from the Security Council's mandate and responsibilities. The repeated failure of the Council to act can only prolong the conflict, rather than end the vicious cycle of violence, resulting only in more bloodshed, suffering and loss for the Palestinian people at the hands of their occupier and in greater instability throughout the region and taking us further from the realization of the just and lasting peace that we all desperately seek.

In conclusion, it is therefore our strong hope that, ultimately and very soon, this Council will find the determination to implement its resolutions, uphold the rule of law and take the necessary course of action to address this growing crisis and to pave the way for a final, peaceful resolution of this long and tragic conflict, for the sake of both the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples and for the sake of the region as a whole. It is not too late to act. Too many human lives, the future of an entire people and the prospects for peace and stability in the region are at stake.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your able stewardship of this Council during the difficult month of July. May I also take this opportunity to extend to you and to your people an early, but very happy, wish for a happy 14 July.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the United States for its bold stand and to express our appreciation to those countries that, by their vote, showed the understanding we had hoped all the international community would show.

Allow me to recall a very different time in two very different places. Nearly a year ago, Israel disengaged from Gaza. The disengagement was not an easy process for us. It took place under dramatic and heart-wrenching circumstances and came at a huge political and personal price to Prime Minister Sharon, who took that brave decision. At that point in time, the Palestinians had two choices. The first was to care for their own people, raise their standard of living, improve their quality of life and concentrate on the welfare and well-being of their own people. The second was to turn Gaza into a terror base and a launching pad for deadly rockets into Israel. Tragically, the Palestinian leadership chose the latter, making their own people hostage to their terrorist agenda.

And, over six years ago, Israel completely withdrew from southern Lebanon. That withdrawal was not an easy process for us either and was questioned internally. At that point in time, the Government of Lebanon, too, had two choices: to care for their own people and to rehabilitate their country after decades of a civil war, or to allow their sovereign territory to become a terror base from which Hizbollah terrorists could launch attacks against Israeli civilians. Tragically, the Lebanese Government also chose the latter.

In both cases, the respective Governments chose to make their own people hostage to the path of terror, destruction and bloodshed. There is no reason for violence from these two places from which Israel has completely withdrawn. Israel cannot and will not permit these areas to be used as a breeding ground for terrorists or a launching pad for terrorist actions. Israel will not be held hostage to terror.

Let us consider who is Hamas. What are their strategies and intent? The Hamas, leading the Palestinian Authority, is an entity that not merely sympathizes with terrorists; it is itself an internationally recognized terrorist organization. Think of the significance of the fact that this is the recognized leadership of the Palestinian people. Think, also, of the way it has conducted itself since assuming power, showing no sign of changing its ways and rejecting the international community's demand to renounce terror, recognize Israel and honour all previous international agreements.

Weeks ago, terrorists infiltrated the area of Kerem Shalom, near the border crossing. The attackers killed two Israeli soldiers and kidnapped a third, Corporal Gilad Shalit, who was taken into the Gaza Strip. During that very same week, Palestinian terrorists also kidnapped an Israeli teenager and brutally executed him. Israel has been under attack for weeks. But only after all international efforts to mediate in the crisis failed did Israel take the steps necessary to defend itself and quell the ceaseless assaults.

Let me be perfectly clear. What we are seeing are the actions of Hamas and Hizbollah. But they are merely the fingers of the blood-stained hands and the executioners of the twisted minds of the leaders of the

world's most ominous axis of terror, Syria and Iran. This axis of terror, which we have warned against repeatedly, including in the Security Council, is constituted of Iran, whose President repeatedly denies the Holocaust while preparing the next one, and Syria, a host country to the world's major terrorist organizations. Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hizbollah are a threat not just to Israel and to the region, but to the entire free world. Several days ago, the Hamas terrorist leader, Khaled Mashaal, who is warmly harboured in Damascus by the Syrian Government, thanked the Syrian leadership for resisting international pressure to help a peaceful solution to the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Another member of this axis, Iran, is repeatedly calling for the annihilation of Israel while acquiring the nuclear capability to carry it out.

Both the Syrian and Iranian Governments have a long, documented history of sabotaging efforts towards peace in the region. They actively support radical elements and weaken voices of reason. They host terrorist organizations and finance their deadly acts. We must recognize these regimes by their words and deeds. They are instigators and supporters of international terrorism, and their heinous acts know no moral bounds. No nation should turn a blind eye towards the Governments of Syria and Iran simply because their actions have not yet touched its own citizens. Left unchecked, these terror regimes soon come to menace even those with whom they have no quarrel. History tries to teach us a lesson that we too often forget: appeasement and silence make a perilous strategy.

We have been hearing the Palestinian observer and other Arab delegations repeatedly state that Israel is — and here comes the mantra — "the occupying Power". Let there be no confusion with reality. We disengaged from the Gaza Strip precisely because we do not want to be an occupying Power. We do not want to control Palestinian lives. Let it be made very, very clear: it is not Israel, but terror, that is the occupying power of Israelis, Palestinians and Lebanese alike. They are all held hostage to that occupying power of terror.

We are doing what we can under the circumstances to balance our duty as a Government to free our kidnapped soldiers and protect our citizens from further attacks, as any responsible Government would do, with a wish to minimize any negative impact this duty might have on civilian populations. But let me point out to the Council the very clear difference between the two sides, when it comes to civilian casualties — and there is a very clear difference.

On the one hand, you have a terror organization committed to the destruction of Israel who specifically targets civilians, innocents, women and children. On the other hand, you have a democratic State acting in self-defence and, as happens in war, especially when the attacks are launched from densely populated civilian areas, sometimes, unfortunately, tragically, painfully, civilians get hurt. But there is another difference. For us, every dead Palestinian child is a mistake and a tragedy. For them, every dead Israeli child is a victory and a cause for celebration.

Israel cannot be held hostage to terrorism in its various forms, including kidnapping, suicide bombings, rockets or any similar threats. We urge the international community to continue applying all possible political pressure on the Palestinian Authority and on the Hamas terrorist organization, including its members and sponsors in Damascus, so as to ensure the immediate and safe release of Gilad Shalit and to finally bring an end to the use of Palestinian territory as a base for terrorist operations.

In conclusion, Mr. President, as we sit here during these very difficult days, I urge you and I urge my colleagues to ask yourselves this question — what would you do if your countries found themselves under such attacks? If your neighbours infiltrated your borders to kidnap your people and if hundreds of rockets were launched at your towns and villages, would you just sit back and take it? Or would you do exactly what Israel is doing at this very minute, making every effort to protect its people and allow them to live in the peace and security that they long for and that all the people in the region have for so long been deprived of by the forces of terror.

The President *(spoke in French)*: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.